

No 61

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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE
STORY

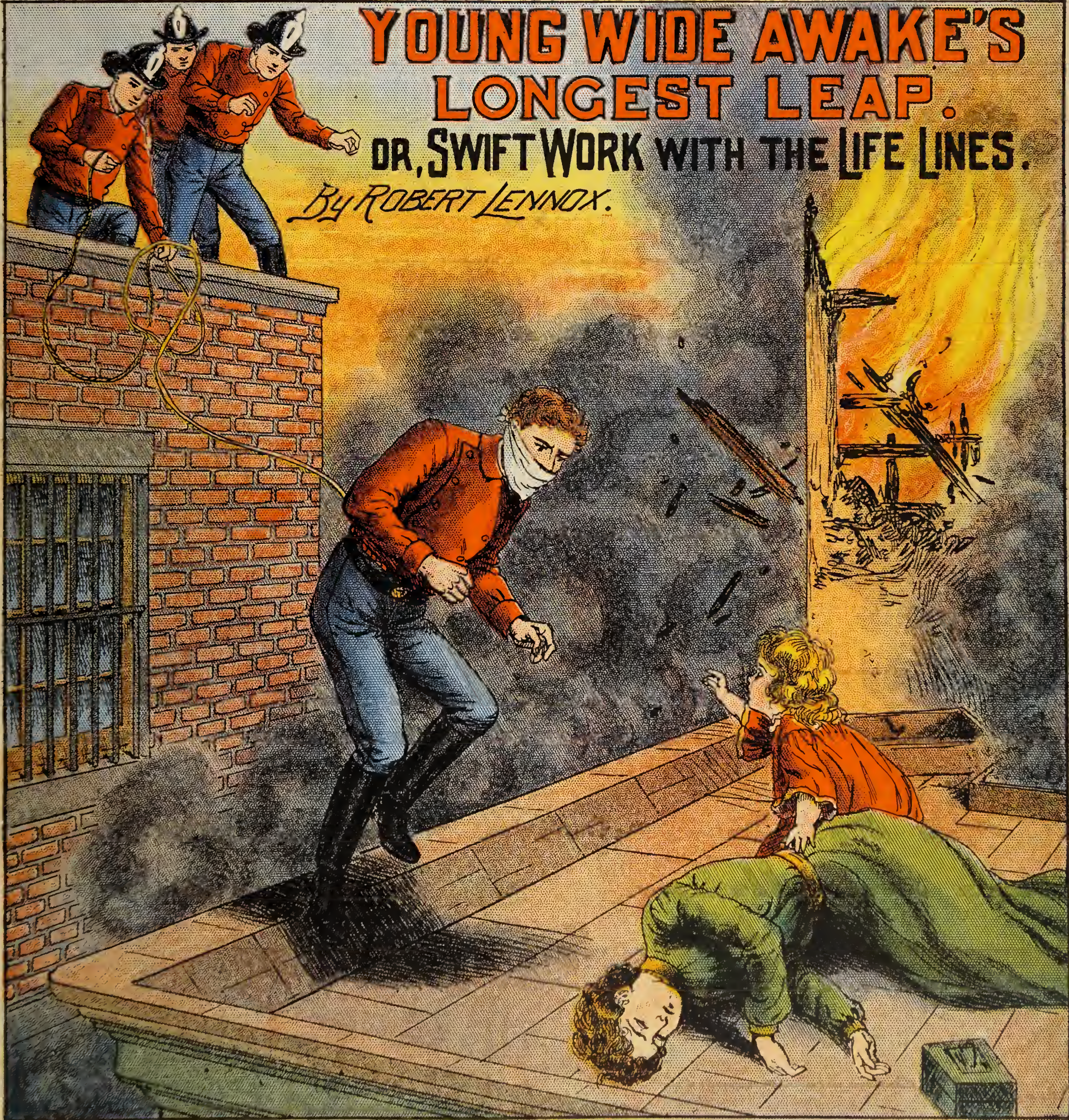
WEEKLY.

EVERY
WEEK.

YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S LONGEST LEAP.

OR, SWIFT WORK WITH THE LIFE LINES.

By ROBERT LENNOX.



Knotting the handkerchief over mouth and nostrils, Young Wide Awake made the long, daring leap that seemed like suicide. He landed beside the senseless woman and terrified child. "Be cool, now, little one! Help me save your mother!" called Wide.

WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

A COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK.

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Young Wide Awake's Longest Leap

OR,

SWIFT WORK WITH THE LIFE LINES

By **ROBERT LENNOX**

CHAPTER I.

TROT SMELLS MISCHIEF.

It was an afternoon at the beginning of the summer vacation term.

Several of the young members of the Washington No. 1 Fire Company were gathered in the upper hall at their cosy little fire-house in Holmes Street, Belmont.

"Don't anybody speak, please," begged Joe Darrell.

"What's the matter?" Alf Ryder asked the foreman of the engine crew.

"I don't want to think," murmured Joe, lazily, as, with closed eyes, he leaned back in a sloping canvas chair that he himself had brought to the hall.

"Shure, Joe," teased Foreman Terry Rourke, of the hose carriage crew, "ye never were much on thinking."

Even this slur failed to arouse Joe, combative though he usually was.

"Do just a little thinking, Joe," urged Young Wide Awake, teasingly.

"Won't!" snapped Darrell.

"Think over all you know," Wide went on, tormentingly. "That won't take you long, and the job will be so restful that you'll go to sleep while thinking it over."

There was a chorus of laughter at this sally.

Joe turned his head, glaring at his captain, but Wide was so handy in meeting a sudden spring or unexpected clutch that Joe, in his present indolent mood, couldn't see any prospect of satisfaction in jumping at our hero.

"That reminds me of a conundrum," went on Phil Scott. "If——"

Joe reached down for an old shoe that Skip, the boy janitor, had left on the floor nearby, picked it up and hurled it at Phil's head.

But young Scott, on the lookout for just such a trick, caught the shoe.

"Call that safe?" Phil challenged. "Judgment!"

He struck an attitude, then struck something else, for he hurled the shoe neatly back so that it struck Joe neatly on the stomach.

"Ouch! Ugh!"

With an exclamation of rage, Joe bounded from his chair, darting after Phil, who had taken to flight.

Some one sitting there in the circle stuck out a foot.

Joe tripped over it, fell flat, then bounded up again, this time wholly out of patience.

"Who did that?" he demanded, glaring at several innocent faces.

"I," mocked Phil, from the doorway.

"I wish whoever did it would have the sand to own up to it," glared Joe.

Yet, though the members of Washington No. 1 were supposed to be rather famous for their courage, no one proved himself a hero just then by acknowledging that he was the tripper.

"You fellows all know who did that," flared Joe, making another searching round of the innocent faces.

There was no answer.

"And you who know, also know what a fool idiot and white-livered chap it was, to do a thing like that," Joe went on. "He's the fool of the engine company, anyway."

"Who?" demanded Terry, in pretended astonishment.

"The fellow who tripped me," raged Joe.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know."

"Thin Oi lave it to the fellers who's the biggest idiot—the feller thot plays a little thrick, or the feller thot goes around tagging names on fellers he don't know," challenged Terry.

Purposely, his remark was rather vague.

Joe tried to think out what it meant, then, with a growl, made a sudden grab at Terry.

Rourke, however, failed to be close enough at hand to get caught.

"Catch that lunatic, Darrell, before he does any harm!" warned Phil from the door.

When Joe got one of his tantrum streaks on the fellows loved nothing better than to tease him a bit.

Half a dozen of them grabbed him at once, holding him tightly.

"Let go of me, you—goats!" panted Darrell, angrily.

They gave him the laugh, however, as he struggled in vain to free himself from so many captors.

"Let go of me, and I'll fight you, one at a time," quivered Joe.

"Let him go," interposed Wide, breaking in through the group.

He himself caught Joe by the arm, giving him considerable of a shake.

"Quit your blamed nonsense, Joe," warned the young captain. "You'll go too far, if you don't look out, and then you'll find that other folks beside yourself can have bad tempers."

"I want to know who tripped me," insisted Darrell.

"I did," Wide replied, coolly.

"You didn't, either," growled Joe. "I was looking at your face when I fell. You weren't near enough to trip me."

"What's the use of asking me, if you won't believe me?" laughed Young Wide Awake.

"But I've got to find that fellow, and reckon with him," insisted Joe, angrily. "It's a shame that you fellows can't let me have a little peace once in a while."

"Perhaps you'll recollect that nothing happened until you began to throw things," Wide reminded him. "Now, go back and sit down—or else get out of here for the present."

But Joe, released, made another sudden dive for Terry Rourke.

Terry dodged, then panted, grinningly:

"Take him out, fellers, and tur-rn the stream on him. That'll cool him off."

With a yell, the young Washingtons closed in on Joe, nabbed him, and again held him helpless.

"Now, down in the yar-rd wid him," bossed Terry. "The post in the back yard is a foine thing to tie him to."

Young Wide Awake made no objection, as the frolickers bore Joe, in an ugly frame of mind, down the stairs and through into the back yard.

Wide followed, however, to see that the fellows didn't carry it too far.

As Joe's captors bore him out to the torment, Phil Scott tarried long enough in the engine-room to get a couple of the smaller asbestos life-lines.

These, pliable and flexible as they were, were ideal ropes for tying any one up with.

"Say, you fellows quit this, will you?" yelled Joe.

"Yes; when you're cool enough."

Joe got his right fist free, ready to punch some one, but the arm was caught again on the instant.

Then, chuckling, the young torments ran their comrade over to the post.

Like a flash, Phil got two turns of one of the lines around Joe and the post.

Then, quickly enough, they finished the job, winding Joe in many coils of tightly drawn rope.

Alf Ryder, Phil and Perkins now ran out a short length of hose, coupled to a tap in the engine-room.

It was the piece of hose that they used for washing off their engine and hose carriage in the same back yard.

"Oi wondher av the wather's clean, fellers," cautioned Terry. "Shure, 't would be a sin to throw dir-rty wather over a fine gentleman like Joe himself."

Phil had the nozzle, facing the glaring Joe.

"Just give the water a twist, Alf, while I have a look at it," requested Phil, turning the nozzle so that the stream would strike an old empty packing-case over by the fence.

Squirt! At the first douse of water against the packing-case there came a yell and a string of curses from inside.

Phil, in his astonishment, forgot to turn the hose away.

The stream went on striking solidly against the side of the big box.

As there were cracks in the side of the box, a generous share of the water was forcing itself through into the box.

"Let up with that water, I tell you!" roared a choking voice.

"It's a hobo!" cried Brad Thompson.

"Trot him out!" yelled some one else.

"Tie him to the post, too, and give him a bath!"

"Then lug him to the police station, and the justice'll give him thirty days' rest in the county jail."

Trot, the engine company's coach dog mascot, had come slowly out into the yard.

Now, however, at the first sound of that cursing voice in the box, Trot's hair bristled.

He leaped at the packing-case, barking fiercely.

Wide's attention was attracted to the dog's antics.

Trot seldom took note of strangers, as long as they kept out of the engine-house itself.

"The dog must smell mischief," our hero muttered to Terry.

"Av he does, it's in thot box," grinned Terry. "Br-ring some boards and a few nails, and we'll box it up and dig a hole. 'Tis sildom ye can bur-ry throuble that easy!"

"Here, Trot! Come here, sir!" ordered Wide.

But the coach dog was so angry over whatever was in that box that he had to be dragged away.

Brad got the dog by the collar, and brought him over to Wide.

Phil, in the meantime, had turned the nozzle so that the stream struck a far corner in the fence.

Out of the box crawled a man who, despite his bedraggled condition, did not look exactly like a tramp.

His clothing was a bit seedy, to be sure, yet this man, who was abouty forty years of age, three inches under six feet in height, dark of hair and with a grizzled mustache, looked like a hard-luck circus man or played-out sport.

"Between your water and your dogs, you're a hoodlum crowd," growled the man.

"Strangers are not allowed in this yard, anyway," warned Wide, quietly. "It would be better for you to finish your nap somewhere else."

Grumbling, the fellow started for the alley that led to the street.

Gr-r-r-r! His hair still bristling, Trot tore himself away from Young Wide Awake's grasp.

Wide leaped after him, but Trot was speedier of foot.

The stranger, too, with another yell, tried to do what he could in the way of speed.

Grip! Trot had the stranger's coat-tails between his teeth.

There was a tearing sound, then the stranger got away, heading for Holmes Street, while Trot turned to look at our hero, at the same time shaking the fragments of cloth in his mouth.

"Why, you brute, you tore one tail clean out of that poor chap's coat," uttered Wide, angrily. "He doesn't look as if he could afford to lose a coat, either. Give that up to me, sir."

Wide had hold of the torn-off coat-tail, so Trot gave it up, though reluctantly.

"Now, why on ear-rth did Trot object to thot feller?" demanded Terry.

"There must have been some reason. Trot is a pretty knowing old fellow," Wide answered.

He felt something stiff between the cloth and the lining as he turned the coat-tail over in his hands.

"Why, there is a pocket here," murmured Wide.

"Thin Oi'm hoping the poor feller didn't have his bank-book in there," grinned Rourke.

What Wide brought to light was a letter.

"Mrs. Anna Wright, 237 Gerald Street," he read, from the address on the envelope.

"Belmont?" queried Terry.

"Yez."

"Thin th' lady is easy found," declared Terry.

"I'll mail it to Mrs. Wright this afternoon," Wide declared.

"Don't you fellows dare let that water touch me!" warned Joe, angrily.

"Come in, away from the racket," murmured Wide, and Terry followed him into the engine-house.

From the street door they could hear the lively splashing of water, and knew that Joe was getting his full measure of punishment.

They could hear the laughter and jeers of the young tormentors, too.

Wide had dropped the letter, which was already opened, into his coat-pocket.

Trot remained behind in the rear yard, his hair still bristling somewhat.

"Quare, the effect av that sthranger on the dog," commented Terry.

"I'm afraid the fellow was there for no good purpose," Wide answered. "Trot doesn't often make mistakes, and he didn't like that fellow a bit."

"Here he's coming now," muttered Terry, glancing up the street.

"Skip back and tie Trot, or he'll chew the poor hobo," said Young Wide Awake.

Looking sharply ahead, the man who had lost a coat-tail came to the engine-house door.

"Looking for this part of your garment?" Wide queried, holding out the torn-off coat-tail.

With an eager cry the stranger pounced upon the fabric, just as Terry came back into the engine-room.

From an inspection of the pocket in the coat-tail, the stranger looked quickly up, a glint of suspicion in his eyes.

"That letter isn't here," he snarled.

"Isn't it?" asked Wide, indifferently.

"No, it isn't!"

"What letter?"

"There was one in this pocket when your infernal dog tore it away. That letter was important to me."

"I'm sorry if you've lost it," replied Wide, coolly.

"I want that letter, I tell you!"

"Is the dog tied, Terry?" queried our hero.

"Faith, and he is," answered Rourke.

"You can go back in the yard and look for your letter, then," Young Wide Awake informed the stranger.

"Will you come with me?"

"It isn't necessary. The dog's tied."

"Will you come with me, just the same?" insisted the stranger.

"No," Wide answered, shortly, for he didn't like the fellow's manner or looks much better than Trot had done.

With a grunt, the stranger started around and up the alley.

Presently he came back.

"That letter isn't in the yard there, anywhere," he announced.

"I didn't say it was, did I?" Wide questioned.

"I begin to think you know where it is!"

"I'm not responsible for your opinions, am I?" Wide retorted.

"If you know where that letter is, I order you to give it to me."

"And I order you away from in front of this engine-house," Wide rejoined. "You're a nuisance here. Git!"

That was such unusual language for good-natured Young Wide Awake that Terry Rourke gave a little start of surprise.

Despite the order, the fellow showed such an evident intention of staying where he was that Terry, with a look at Wide, announced:

"Oi'm goin' back t' give the dog his freedom."

"Wait a minute," begged the stranger, appealingly. "Now, see here, young man, if you know where that missing letter is I appeal to you to turn it over to me."

"What's your name?" Wide inquired, eyeing the fellow, sharply.

"Er—er—Abner Judson."

"I've seen no letter addressed to you. Have you, Terry?"

"Oh, the letter wasn't addressed to me," the stranger went on, hastily.

"I don't quite see that you've got any business with letters addressed to other persons, friend Judson," Wide replied, blandly.

Terry, without waiting for more, turned and went back to the yard.

"He's untying the dog, I suppose," Wide smiled. "Funny, wasn't it, what a dislike the dog took to you?"

Trot's yelp being heard, the stranger, who called himself Judson, shambled off.

"Keep that dog back till I get up the street," he called back. "You'll hear from me later."

Trot bounded through the engine-house, out into the street.

There the mascot stood, hair again bristling, though Trot did not offer to run after Judson.

"Quare what a dislike Trot takes t' him," observed Terry.

"Very," Wide replied, drily.

"Ye'll not give him the letter, thin?"

"Hardly, as it's not addressed to Abner Judson, but to a lady."

"What's the letter about, I wonder?"

"As it's a lady's letter, I don't expect to know," Wide smiled. "Did you bring your bike this afternoon, Terry?"

"No; Oi walked."

"Then I'll take a run down to Gerald Street alone, old fellow. I won't be gone long, in case I find the lady at home."

Wide wheeled away, deliberately.

He took but small interest in the matter of the letter.

He had noticed only that the letter was not stamped or post-marked, but that the letter had been opened, as if it had reached its destination at one time.

Had Young Wide Awake guessed the string of adventures he was running into, he would have been much more interested in the letter and in its contents.

CHAPTER II.

WIDE AND THE MEANEST BLACKMAILER ALIVE.

The house in Gerald Street proved to be a very modest-looking two-story affair.

Mrs. Wright, he found, had rooms on the upper floor.

Wide ascended the stairs, knocking at the door he had been directed to.

"Come in!" called a voice so sweet that it won our hero even before he saw the owner of the voice.

As Wide stepped inside he found himself confronted by a young woman under thirty.

She had been a woman of unusual beauty, but her face looked as though deep suffering had left its mark there.

She was plainly garbed, though with exquisite neatness. Her figure was trim and perfect.

She had the look of a woman who had seen much trouble, but whom trouble could not wholly down.

Across the room, also looking at our hero, was one of the loveliest little girls he had ever seen.

The child looked like a perfect miniature of her mother, but the seal of trouble and care was not on the child's face.

"Mrs. Wright?" Wide asked.

"Yes."

"I have a letter addressed to you that came into my possession," Young Wide Awake announced, producing the letter and handing it over.

The woman took it, uttering a cry.

What was there about it that could make her face so ghastly white?

"Go into another room, Elsie," she directed, "and close the door."

After the child had obeyed, Mrs. Wright turned to our hero with:

"Well?"

"I don't understand you, madam."

"How much do you want?"

The woman's voice had grown cold and hard, though her bosom was heaving.

There was a frightened look in her eyes that perplexed the young fireman.

"How much do I want?" repeated Wide. "What for, Mrs. Wright? For returning your letter? That was no trouble at all, I assure you."

"Let us have done with all pretence," begged the woman, wearily. "Abner Judson sent you, I suppose?"

"Indeed not, madam. I might rather say that I came in spite of him."

"In spite of him?"

"He claimed the letter for himself, but as it wasn't addressed to him I wouldn't let him have it."

"Are you going to take it away from me now?" demanded the woman, her color going fast.

"Take it away from you? Your own letter, madam! There is something about all this that I don't understand. But it is none of my business, anyway."

"I wish I could believe you honest——" panted the woman, then paused suddenly.

"Thank you," said Wide, bluntly. "I have always supposed that I was."

"Yet, since you know the contents of this letter——"

"I don't, madam. It wasn't addressed to me, so, of course, I didn't read it."

"What?" cried the woman, eagerly, then unbelievably.

"I wish I could believe that. But you come from Abner Judson, and I can believe no one who has dealings with that man."

"Shall I tell you what dealings I've had with him, madam?" smiled Young Wide Awake.

He began his recital, but before he had gotten far she interrupted him with:

"Oh, then you are one of our local firemen?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wright."

Our hero went on with his narrative.

He had nearly finished, when the door was suddenly wrenched open.

Mrs. Wright screamed, running back to the door of the room in which her child was waiting.

It was Abner Judson who stood just inside the threshold, glaring at our hero.

"So you got here ahead of me?" he demanded, harshly.

"Yes," Wide answered, coolly, though he noticed, with inward indignation, that Mrs. Wright was shaking almost as if with ague.

"Have you gone and spoiled the graft—or did you pickle it for yourself?"

"What are you talking about?" Wide demanded.

"That letter——"

"I found it, as you suspected. But it was addressed to Mrs. Wright, and I gave it to her."

"She's holding it behind her back, now, then, is she?" uttered Judson, harshly, as he started to stride across the room.

But Young Wide Awake was in his path, like a young bull, and hurled him back.

"Mrs. Wright, am I acting by your authority in keeping this fellow from going near you?" called the young fireman.

"Yes—no—oh, I don't know!" quivered the terrified woman.

"Make up your mind, please. If you don't want this fellow to come near you, he shan't."

Judson had halted, his hands working convulsively, a sneaking light shining in his eyes, as if he were planning to jump on the young fireman.

"Can you keep him back a moment?" panted Mrs. Wright.

"I believe I can keep him back forever, if you wish," Wide gritted, sternly, for he had already seen that this sweet-faced woman lived in mortal terror of the man who was glaring at her.

"Can you keep him back until I have time to slip into the next room and burn this letter?"

"You shan't do that!" roared Judson, leaping forward. He tried to dash past our hero and spring at the frightened woman.

"Mistake number one!" uttered Wide, hitting the wretch a blow on the jaw that sent him staggering back.

"Don't let him come in here after me!" appealed Mrs. Wright, as she hurriedly threw open the door and fled through it.

"I'll kill him if he tries it," uttered Wide, grimly.

That threat was more for effect than anything else.

But it caused Judson to thrust his right hand into a pocket.

At that, Young Wide Awake leaped at him like a wild-cat, knocking Judson down.

"If you attempt to get up," quivered Wide, standing over him, "I'll break you in small pieces!"

The flash in his eyes must have told Judson that the young fireman meant business.

Abner Judson was bigger and more strongly built than our hero, but he seemed to have neither the speed nor the daring that had enabled the young fire captain to keep himself master of the situation so far.

"Help, help, help! What are they fighting about, mamma?" came in the child's frightened voice.

"Be quiet, Elsie. The young gentleman out there is a friend of ours."

"Is that wicked Mr. Judson hurting him?"

"I—I don't believe he is," laughed Mrs. Wright, nervously.

Then she came out again, closing the door and leaving the child on the other side.

In the woman's eyes shone the light of a new courage.

"My friend," she said, very quietly, "that letter is destroyed."

A yell of rage burst from the lips of Abner Judson, lying flat on the floor.

"If you are addressing me, madam," Wide replied, "I am Captain Dick Halstead, of the fire department."

"Not the famous young Halstead?" cried Mrs. Wright.

"Not, not that one," smiled Wide. "There are no famous Halsteads in Belmont."

"I know who you are, now!" cried the woman, eagerly.

"So do I," snarled Abner Judson.

"Oh, I don't know how to thank you, my young friend," the woman went on, tremulously. "I shall be happy, now, from the fact that you came here this afternoon."

"And I know where I have to work to get square," growled Judson, as he rolled away and got slowly to his feet.

"Madam," went on Wide, "if this wretch has been annoying you, you should report it to the police."

He could not understand why the mention of the word "police" made the woman turn so white, until Judson broke in with:

"The police? Oh, yes! She'd love to go to them and start 'em on her husband's trail."

"Be still, you scoundrel, unless you want me to throw you out!" warned Wide.

"What he says is quite true," went on the woman, quietly. "He has been trying to blackmail me through his knowledge of my husband's misfortunes. Wright is not my name, you understand, Captain Halstead."

"No!" growled Judson. "Her real name is——"

"If you utter it, except by the lady's permission," warned Wide, turning on the fellow, hotly, "you and I will fight it out to a finish outside!"

Judson closed his mouth, though he still glared.

"Two years ago," went on Mrs. Wright, in a low voice, as if in order that her child might not overhear, "my husband was forced to leave home on account of a trouble in which he was innocent, though most people believed him guilty. When my husband went away, he did not send for me, and would not allow me to go to him, for fear that I would be trailed and thus lead the officers to him. I was to wait, with my child, until I heard from him that all was safe. When my husband went away, he left in my hands some three thousand dollars' worth of property, which I turned into cash. I have kept that money in bank religiously ever since, waiting until my husband was able to send for me. Then he and I were to use that money for a fresh start."

The woman paused. Wide asked no questions, but waited until she continued:

"Recently, my husband, hiding under another name, got into more trouble, though still innocent. He trusted this fellow, Judson, with a letter to me, in which my husband asked me to send him five hundred dollars. I would gladly have done that, but Judson, who knew about the amount that I have in bank, demanded the whole sum for himself, under threat of exposing me, disgracing my child, and putting the officers on my husband's trail."

"Say," growled Wide, turning upon Judson, who stood, sneering, by the door, "you're just about the meanest blackmailer alive. No matter what this lady's husband may have done, or not have done, you shine in the most miserable light that a wretch could stand in!"

"He showed me the letter—then snatched it away again," went on Mrs. Wright.

"When did he come here first?" Wide now asked.

"This morning."

"Ah! Then he was to come again this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"For the money?"

"Yes."

"And you changed your mind, of course, and decided not to deal with him?"

Wide looked at Mrs. Wright so meaningfully that she was quick to catch his meaning.

"I—I didn't draw the money from the bank, if that's what you mean."

"You had decided to show this scoundrel just how little he could frighten you by his threats?"

"Yes, that was it," the woman agreed, quickly.

"Now, that you've burned your husband's letter, and thus destroyed his own written story of his troubles, can this Judson prove the story in any way?"

"By nothing but his own word."

"I can do something else," growled Abner Judson. "I can go straight to the police station and tell the cops where to hunt for this woman's husband."

"No, you can't," laughed Mrs. Wright, triumphantly. "I've telegraphed my husband, and he won't be found there. You scoundrel, did you suppose I'd trust you to keep my husband's hiding-place a secret, when you would blackmail his helpless wife so shamelessly? Tell the police all you can, Abner Judson."

"That'll make it interesting for you and your little girl, won't it?" sneered Judson. "Just think how people will stare at your child!"

Mrs. Wright paled at that threat.

"This man is annoying you," said Wide. "Do you want him to leave?"

"Yes," murmured the woman.

"You hear?" demanded our hero, turning upon the fellow.

"What if I don't go?" came the sneering retort.

Wide crossed the room at a bound, caught the fellow by the throat and hustled him through the doorway.

"Let go of me, or I'll fix you!" roared the brute.

"Will you, though?"

As Judson reached into one of his pockets, Young Wide Awake struck him a staggering blow in the face.

Then the hand came out—empty, showing that the pretence of reaching for a weapon was all "bluff."

But Judson now fought back as furiously as he could.

Nothing but Wide's superior quickness and skill with his hands saved him from a fearful beating.

As it was, our hero by no means had things all his own way in the fight, that lasted all the way downstairs.

Wide took a good many blows in exchange for those he gave, yet he managed to hustle the brute out onto the sidewalk.

"Now, if you come back, or even hang around here," threatened Wide, "I'll take you in hand and hold on to you until we meet a policeman. I'll see that you're locked up, if you give that poor woman any more trouble!"

Judson looked for a moment or two as if he meant to brave a renewal of the fight.

Then, changing his mind, he slunk away, though with a parting glance that boded ill for the young fireman.

After watching Judson out of sight, our hero ascended the stairs again.

Mrs. Wright met him, with a pallid smile on her face.

"Now, madam," began the young fireman, "I'm going to ask you a leading question. Don't answer me unless you want to."

"Well?"

"Did you draw that money from the bank?"

"I—I drew two thousand of it."

"To pay to that scoundrel, Judson?"

"Yes: unless I found I could satisfy him with less."

"You don't see any need to pay it to him, now?"

"No. Not with that letter destroyed."

"Then, pardon me, madam, but don't you think you had better take the money back to the bank?"

"I—I am almost afraid that if I leave here Judson will assault me in the street to get the money."

"I think he's far more likely to get it, Mrs. Wright, if you keep it hidden in these rooms. As to his troubling you on the street, I will go with you to the door of the bank."

"Oh, if you would! But you have been so kind, Captain Halstead."

"You'll take your little girl with you, of course?"

"I wouldn't dare leave her behind, with that scoundrel Judson prowling about!"

Ten minutes later Mrs. Judson went up the street, leading Elsie by the hand.

Wide did not walk with them, but, on his bicycle, pedalled slowly a little way to the rear, keeping a sharp lookout all the while.

After the money had been deposited, and Mrs. Judson came out, Wide approached her, asking:

"May I speak with you alone for a moment?"

Mrs. Wright sent Elsie on ahead a little way.

"Now, madam, since you have allowed me to make other suggestions, I am going to ask you if you don't think it would be wise for you and your little girl to get away from Belmont for a while—somewhere that Judson cannot find you? If he shows up again, and if you wish, I'll manage to have Judson locked up for twenty-four hours as a suspicious character, so that he can't shadow you to your new home."

"I—I may be ready to leave in the morning. I can't to-day," stammered the woman.

It suddenly dawned on Wide that this anxious woman was expecting her husband, very likely, at some hour before the next morning.

But he gave no sign that he suspected this, as he replied:

"Oh, very good. Is there anything else that I can do for you, Mrs. Wright?"

"Oh, nothing now, Captain Halstead. But you have been so good! You have saved me from so much!"

"If you need me, don't hesitate to send. I can be found either at the fire-house or at my home."

Lifting his hat, Wide got away before Mrs. Wright had time to utter all the thanks that found place in her heart.

"Did yez deliver the letter?" asked Terry, as our hero returned to the fire-house, where Joe was playing dominoes with Hal, and laughing as cheerily as though he had never lost his temper.

"Yes," nodded Wide.

As he offered no more information, Rourke asked for none.

Yet the Irish lad suspected, from Wide's heightened color, that there was much behind the letter that Trot had brought to light.

Had Wide guessed the whole tragic truth, the knowledge would have sent him scurrying, post-haste, to that house in Gerald Street.

CHAPTER III.

WIDE'S FEARFUL LEAP.

It was one of the hottest days of the summer.

Early night came down, hotter than ever, so it seemed.

Every one in Belmont, who could get out, was forced out of doors.

Down in Holmes Street it was as cool as anywhere, and this fact brought many of the young firemen to spend the evening there.

"Wouldn't this be a glorious night to run to a fire?" muttered Joe, dripping with perspiration, though he made no bodily effort in twenty minutes.

"Wouldn't it, dough? Wot!" commented Skip.

"Stop that, both of you!" warned Wide.

"Why?" Joe asked.

"Well, every time a fellow kicks about the fear of having to go to a fire, the blamed old fire alarm begins to——"

Zing! zing! zing!

"There! What did I tell you?" demanded Wide, vengefully. "I never knew it to fail."

"Sounds like our district, too," vented Hal, as it stopped at the third peal. "If there's another number right away——"

There was. The bell began over again.

"Thirty-something!" cried Wide, jumping up. "Box is in our district, anyway!"

Despite the heat there was a swift rush.

By the time that the second round of the alarm was in, the young firemen were nearly all in their togs.

Before the third round had finished they were running the machines out of the engine-house.

Weather made no difference to the young Washingtons.

They sprinted just as nimbly, now, as they could have done in the most bracing October breeze.

"Gerald and Copley streets," commented Hal, to his captain, as they two ran at the head of the company.

"Gerald Street? That's where my luck seems to run to-day," murmured Wide, to himself.

That was all he thought about it for the moment, for he was concerning himself with the running of his company.

Torrent No. 1 covered this district of the city with Washington No. 1, but to this particular box Torrent did not turn out except on a second alarm.

There was all the more need, therefore, for Washington to make good time to the scene of the fire.

As they raced into Copley Street, Wide glanced ahead down the street.

Some distance down he made out the fire.

Then his heart gave a sudden bound.

"Why, yes, it is—it must be—the house where Mrs. Wright and her child live—and up on their floor, too."

Sprint, Washingtons!" he bellowed, aloud, through his trumpet.

As for himself, Young Wide Awake put on a spurt that carried him far ahead even of Hal.

A good deal of a crowd had gathered already.

As Wide dashed by these people he scanned the faces of those that he passed without espying the faces of Elsie and her mother.

The policeman on the beat was standing there, as his duty required, to give information to the firemen.

"You can't save this old' wooden hulk, Wide," grinned the officer.

"Where did it start? Do you know?"

"Yes; in a three-story extension at the rear. It's eating through to the front, as you can see."

"Are all the folks out?"

"Yes."

"You're positive of that?"

"Of course I am, Wide. I know my business."

"Did you see the people come out?"

"I helped some of 'em out before the flames got through so far."

"Did you see a woman and her little daughter, who lived on the upper floor?" asked Wide, anxiously.

"No; but they're out."

"Now, how do you know?"

"A man told me he brought 'em out safely."

"Do you know the man?"

"No."

"What did he look like?"

"A man about forty, with dark hair and half-gray mustache, and——"

The hastily given description fitted to a "T" with Abner Judson.

Wide was filled with quick misgivings.

"Ring a second alarm, Ted, for Torrent," he directed his young aide.

He also ordered Hal to fight the fire from the street as best he could.

"Now, come through with me into this next building. Terry, Joe, Brad," ordered Wide, calling out their names. "Bring the life-lines, too."

The next building was a three-story affair, separated by several feet from the one that was afire.

Wide snatched down his axe as he darted for the door of that next building.

There was no need to use the axe here, as the door stood open.

Up to the second story dashed the young fire captain, followed by his three comrades.

On the second story was a window, just about flush with the roof of the front portion of the burning building.

But the window was barred heavily with iron barriers.

As Wide peered through the bars at the flame-lit roof opposite, a goan of anguish came from his lips.

"What is it?" demanded Terry, just as the Irish boy reached his side.

Then Rourke saw for himself.

The third-story extension at the rear was naught, now, but a blazing skeleton of the walls that had once been.

The top of the roof opposite was fast igniting.

And there on the roof, hemmed in, a prey to flames, without hope, save for what the young fireman could do, lay Mrs. Wright, in a dead faint.

At her side hovered little Elsie, calling frantically to her mother to awake and save them both. Near them was the bond box in which Mrs. Wright had kept the money she deposited in the bank.

So absorbed was Elsie in her agony that she did not see the young firemen at the barred window opposite until our hero called:

"It's all right, Elsie! We'll reach you in a jiffy!"

Though the young firemen were now speeding away from the window, to a flight of stairs that led to the roof, the child recognized the voice, and called back, joyously:

"Oh, Mr. Halstead, how glad I am you're here!"

That cry, full of childish faith, reached Wide just as he appeared on the roof.

Running over to the brink of the chasm that separated him from mother and child, Wide glanced down through the lurid flame and stifling smoke.

His heart sank in an instant.

He had hoped it would be possible for him to order up a ladder from the street, haul it over to the roof, and then extend it down to the lower roof, on which Elsie crouched beside her unconscious mother.

But Wide quickly saw how hopeless that would be.

From Mrs. Wright's rooms flames were now pouring out at the side.

A ladder from the roof, past those flames, would be but a gridiron on which to roast whoever tried to pass. For, by the time the ladder could be got up in place the flames would be leaping up past the roof edge of the doomed building.

"Bedad, thin' av annything's done, it'll be done in th' nixt minute or not at all," panted Terry.

"Tie your life-line to my belt rings! Hustle—like lightning!" ordered Wide, hoarsely.

"What are yez goin' t' do?" demanded Terry, as he and Joe sprang to obey the order.

"The only thing that can be done!"

"What's thot?"

"I've got to jump to that roof!"

"It can't be done!" quivered Joe.

"It's got to be done!"

"Come quick. Mr. Halstead—do!"

Elsie's pleading, childish voice rang, quiveringly, on the thick air.

"Hold the rope tight, fellows!" uttered Wide, hoarsely. "Now, just to one side, so I can have space to run for the jump!"

Getting as good a start as he could, Young Wide Awake ran swiftly to the brink, then leaped far out and down, casting his whole life on the stake of winning that leap!

CHAPTER IV.

CATCHING A THIEF AT THE FIRE LINES.

Just before Wide leaped, Terry offered him a handkerchief.

"It's wise ye'll be to tie that over yure nose," Terry urged.

Knotting the handkerchief over mouth and nostrils, Young Wide Awake then made the long, daring leap that seemed like suicide.

He landed beside the senseless woman and terrified child.

"Be cool, now, little one! Help me to save your mother!" called Wide.

"What shall I do?" asked Elsie, in an awed, quivering voice.

"Just keep quiet and watch us for a few seconds," smiled Wide, giving the child a quick pat on the head.

Then he turned to shout:

"Another line, Terry!"

Rourke had one coiled and ready to throw.

Whizz-zz! Elsie dodged as it came, but she had no need to, for Wide caught it over his head.

Terry still holding one end, Young Wide Awake ran the other end twice around the woman's shoulders, knotting the line most securely.

"What are you going to do?" came Elsie's wondering question.

"We're going to swing your mother off and lift her to the other roof."

"O-o-o-oh!" she won't fall and be hurt, will she?"

"No; you'll see how nicely we'll do it. Come down over the side of your building, Terry!"

Rourke had already hastened another life-line around a nearby chimney. Now he stood at the edge, while Joe fastened the rope to Terry's belt and another quick turn and knot under his shoulders.

The rope was just long enough so that Terry, as he was hoisted over the side, went down to just above the level of the opposite roof and hung there.

The further end of the line that had been secured to Mrs. Wright was made fast around the same chimney that held Terry's line.

"Get a good grip on the line, Joe and Brad," sang Wide, as he dragged Mrs. Wright's lifeless form close to the edge of the roof. "All ready?"

"All ready!" came back the steady answer.

"Catch her, Terry!"

Wide swung the woman's body, pendulum-like, out into mid-air, and gave her a push.

Elsie uttered a muffled scream, but Terry, hanging across the way, serves as a buffer against harm, and caught the senseless woman in his arms.

"Hurroo!" grunted Terry. "Lift her, byes!"

Mrs. Wright was quickly hauled to the roof.

"Send back the line!" yelled Wide. "It's getting hot and choky here, and fearful for the child."

Swish! came the line. Wide tied it to Elsie with nimble fingers.

"You're going to jump with me, little one," Wide told her, cheerily. "But you'll have your own line, too, in case you should get separated from me."

"I won't get separated. I'll hold tight!" promised the child, putting her arms tightly around the young fire captain's neck as he lifted her.

In the instant before the leap the child quickly thrust her face forward and kissed Wide softly.

The confidence of the child thrilled the young fire captain.

"Now, then, little one!" as Wide poised on the roof edge. "Don't be afraid."

"I'm not, with you!"

Wide sprang. His rope being longer, he fell a little lower than Mrs. Wright had done.

Yet he was able to pass the child up to Terry, thus saving Elsie from the strain and cutting of the line around her own tender little body.

"Can ye hoist us both?" called up Terry.

"Sure!" gritted Joe.

It was something of a tug, to be sure, but they landed Rourke and the child at the roof edge.

Then they lifted Elsie free, while Rourke drew himself up to safety.

Wide, having caught at his own life-line above his head, was slowly hoisting himself. His hands touched the gutter, and he drew himself up and over.

"Oh, Mr. Halstead! You did do it! You saved us!" cried Elsie, running toward him.

"Yes, little one! Now, be a good girl, and take hold of Mr. Thompson's hand. No; let him carry you, and he'll get you down into the street in a jiffy."

Wide himself, as soon as he was free of his tackle, lifted the still unconscious Mrs. Wright in his arms and started down, Terry standing by him.

Joe quickly unknotted the fire-ropes before following.

"Torrent's coming up the street," hailed Ted Lester, meeting them.

"Then hustle back and tell Hal to rush our hose up this way to the roof. He wants to play on the fire opposite, and also along the sides of this building, to prevent it from catching. Torrent can have the street end of it."

As Wide reached the street, bearing Mrs. Wright in his arms, he saw that Chief Pelton had just reached the scene.

"I'm ordering our hose up to the roof, Chief," Wide explained. "Is that right?"

"O. K., Captain," nodded the chief, briefly.

Hal, his nozzlemen and hose-line bearers went sweeping by the chief, disappearing into the building.

At this moment Torrent came clattering onto the ground, having coupled at the next hydrant down the street.

Chief Pelton turned to give Captain Black his orders, while Wide went on with his unconscious burden as far as the fire lines.

Chief of Police Sharp saw them coming, and passed the word to get a doctor in haste.

One happened to be in the crowd. He hurried forward, bending over the woman, as Wide laid her on the ground, while Phil brought one of the rubber fire blankets, rolled, for a pillow.

"Pull her out, Doc, and you'll save two lives," murmured Wide, pointing to the child, who stood by, a picture of silent anxiety and stifled dread.

"Oh, we'll have her around soon," answered the medical man, cheerily, as he felt at the pulse. "Partly smoke choked, but more faint from fright—probably over her child."

Wide turned to dart back to his own duties.

Word came down from Hal at this moment that the stream pressure was not hard enough.

"Swing on to the pumping-bars harder, fellows," urged Wide. "This is where we've got to have water, and high up. Wait, I'll get you a few helpers from the crowd."

Raising his hand, Wide shouted, beckoning to the chief of police down at the fire lines.

A dozen men cheerfully volunteered, and Sharp let them through.

They came on the run, crowding in wherever there was a chance at the pumping-bars.

"Spiel up to the roof, Ted, and see if Hal wants me."

Lester was soon back, with the word, "No."

That left Wide clear for the moment. Rourke was also idle for lack of anything in his line to do. Joe had gone back to bossing the pumping.

"Wan av these days," murmured Terry, "ye'll make a jump like thot too much, Wide."

"Then Washington will have a chance for a captain who knows more about fire-fighting," smiled Wide.

"Now, Oi'm not so sure av thot," retorted Terry, "for Oi har-rdly think they'd give me the show as yet. Wid thot rope at yure belt, Wide, s'pose ye had fallen short in yure jump, and sthruck against either building?"

"Suppose we had let the woman stay where she was, and the child, too," uttered Wide, drily. "It would have been sport to stand on the other roof and watch them burn, wouldn't it? Terry, there's one great trouble with the Irish."

"What's thot?" demanded Terry, in surprise.

"They're chuck full of caution for their friends, but they never know how to use it for themselves. You'd have jumped yourself in a second if it had come to you."

"Shure Oi wud," Terry admitted. "But thot's diff'rnt. Oi'm not the captain!"

Torrent had attacked the next building, pouring its stream in hard, and that was all the men's company could do, as the old structure was blazing so hotly that there was no living inside for axe and pike men.

Wide turned to go back to the fire lines. He was curious to know if Mrs. Wright was coming to.

A woman in the crowd had lifted Elsie, and was talking to her.

The doctor turned to go to a house window to ask for a basin of water.

As the medical man did so, another man slipped out of the crowd and knelt beside the woman, examining her.

There was nothing unusual in his movements, so the crowd paid no attention.

Probably Wide would have given it no thought, either, only he recognized the fellow.

It was Abner Judson.

"Now, what's he up to?" wondered Wide, stealing forward.

He saw what the crowd did not see.

Judson, hiding one hand under the edge of the woman's skirt, was slipping it into her dress pocket.

Wide stole closer.

As Judson's hand came back, he strove to slip something that he held into one of his own pockets.

"No, you don't!" uttered Wide, coolly, leaping upon the fellow from behind, and seizing that forearm in a tight clutch.

Judson, with an oath, dropped something to the ground.

With a cry of triumph Young Wide Awake pounced on that something and held it up.

"He was trying to steal this poor woman's bank-book!" cried Wide. "Grab the scoundrel and hold him!"

Three or four men reached out to take hold of the fellow, who had wrenched himself free and gotten just beyond our hero's grip.

"Captain!" called a fireman up the street.

Our hero turned to see what was wanted, convinced that there were enough men at hand to take care of Judson.

But that scoundrel, with a snarl, had thrust a hand into a pocket and his would-be captors fell back before that threat of a weapon.

It was a Torrent fireman calling for Captain Black.

As Wide turned again, he saw Judson making a wild dash for liberty.

Our hero turned and raced after him, and a policeman, tardily hearing the excitement, dashed along behind our hero.

As Wide neared the back of the crowd a foot was thrust out slightly in his path.

It was enough to send the young fire captain down to his hands and knees.

Wide was up again and off at his best speed, now behind the slower-moving policeman.

Judson doubled around a corner, into a deserted block, and there both pursuers halted, looking about them.

"I reckon he's got away," uttered Wide, disappointedly.

"What did you want the fellow for, anyway?" demanded the policeman.

Our hero told him.

"What's that you've got in your hand, Wide?"

"Why, that's the bank-book."

"Oh, well, if you've got the property, we needn't feel so badly about losing the thief," was the policeman's calm view of the matter.

"But that was a particularly mean thief. I'm mighty sorry we lost him."

Mrs. Wright had recovered consciousness by the time that our hero returned to her.

Wide handed her the bank-book, saying, in a whisper:

"Since you've got no home to-night, you'll go to a hotel, I hope, madam. Have the hotel people put this bank-book in their safe for you, won't you?"

The doctor who had attended Mrs. Wright now had a carriage called for her, and took the child and herself to the hotel.

"This fire is Judson's own handiwork. It must be," murmured Wide, as he went back to his work.

The burning building was now down in a mass of red-hot embers, on which the firemen were playing drenchingly.

It was an hour's more work for the firemen to get the last glow out in the embers.

Then, hot, tired and wet, the young Washingtons went back to clean up first the apparatus and then themselves.

"Say, you fellows!" called Ted, appearing at the sliding-pole hole above. "When you're all clean and tidy, come up this way."

Ted had provided a surprise for them, indeed.

Men had come in stealthily up the side stairs and laid a folding table. On to this they had stacked dishes and spoons. Four tubs of cracked ice stood there, the ice surrounding cans of ice cream. A baker's boy had just brought up several cakes, and was now "carving" them.

"See here, Slam," whispered Ted, gripping the ever-hungry Sam Bangs by the arm, "come over to this special table of your own."

It was Skip's own table. On it was a whole cake, a dish and a spoon. Down on the floor beside it stood a tub of cracked ice.

"Here's a special two quarts of cream for yourself, Slam," whispered Ted. "Now, pitch in and fill up."

"Only two quarts?" sighed Slam, under his breath. "Ted must think my health is failing."

Though Slam was finished long before the others, none of the rest managed to eat as much as two quarts, though all were filled with ice cream and contentment by the time that the feast was over.

"Ted," suggested Wide, after the feed had progressed considerably, "to what do we owe all this comfort? What's the occasion?"

"New batch of pocket money come in to-day," said Ted, quietly.

"I wish it had been more," sighed Slam.

Whether he referred to the ice cream, or the pocket-money, none of those who heard the remark tried to guess.

CHAPTER V.

GREEN EYES BOTHER SKIP.

Wide did not forget that sly trip of the night before.

He could not, for, for one thing, one of the knees on which he had fallen was a bit stiff the next morning.

As our hero went up Main Street the next morning, on a little stroll, he espied Captain Fred Parsons, of Neptune No. 2, on the other side of the street.

"Hold on there, Parsons," called Wide, crossing the street, "I want to see you."

"Can't say as much for you," grumbled Fred, turning and looking at him.

"I suppose you must feel rather mean and cheap, after last night," uttered Young Wide Awake, quietly.

"What's that?"

Fred opened his eyes in an appearance of great astonishment.

"I'm talking about that trip," Wide went on, in such a quiet tone that there was no warning of danger.

"Trip—where?" sneered Fred.

"In Gerald Street, if you want particulars."

"Do you mean the run you had there with your old Washington apparatus?" Fred inquired, coolly.

"I don't, and you know it pretty well," said Wide, as quietly as ever.

"Well, I haven't time to figure out what you do mean. Good-by!"

"Hold on! You won't get away as easily as that!"

Wide leaped forward, grabbing his rival and slamming him up against the fence.

"You act as if you wanted to fight," growled Fred.

"I expect to, anyway, after your dirty trick."

"What trick?"

"You were standing in that crowd, and it was you who thrust your foot out and tripped me, sending me down."

"I didn't."

"You lie, Fred!"

Our hero's voice was still provokingly cool.

"If you want to make an apology, and a proper one, I'll let you off this time, with a warning," Wide went on.

"Oh, ain't you good!"

"You decline to apologize, then?"

"If you say I tripped you last night, then you lie!"

Wide's fist shot out on the instant, but Parsons wasn't just there.

He dodged, then put up his own hands, and the two, who were nearly matched, sparred cautiously.

There was "blood" in the eye of each.

Some blows were given and received, but more were parried.

The young combatants were just warming up to their work, when Hal, Joe and three other Washingtons sighted the fight from a corner that they were turning into Main Street.

"Row! row!" called one of the group, and the five came up, hot-foot.

"Stand back!" cried Fred, throwing down his fists as he darted three or four steps to the rear. "I'll fight you, Halstead, but I'll be hanged if I'm going to fight your whole company."

"You needn't be afraid to keep right on," smiled Wide.

"Our crowd fight fair. Not one of them will touch you."

"Humph! No; they won't!"

"We'll wait till they get here, then, and you'll find out that they are only spectators."

Fred sniffed, disdainfully.

He had so little faith in fair fighting himself that he couldn't believe it exactly possible in others.

"Trouble all over? Kissed and made up?" jeered Joe, the first to reach the spot.

Parsons growled, turning to put on his coat.

"Hold on!" Wide warned him, quickly. "This matter isn't settled yet!"

"Do you suppose I'm going to try to lick a whole mob?" glared Captain Fred.

"You've got to fight me," declared Wide. "I'll jump on you and hammer you, anyway, whether you choose to defend yourself or not. My friends won't jump in to interfere. They've got more manhood than your crowd, that way, at least."

"What? Is the booby afraid that it takes us all to thump him? Why, I'll lick him alone, with my left hand tied tight behind me!"

"I'll take you up on that," grinned Fred, hopefully.

"No, you won't," our hero retorted. "No one handles you, Parsons, until I've got through with you. Fellows, this dirty sneak put out his foot and tripped me last night at the fire. Now, I'm settling with the cowardly sneak."

"You don't need to tell us what kind of a sneak he is," Hal put in, quietly. "We all know. Just think, fellows, that kind of a thing sometimes imagines he's a man and a gentleman."

Fred's face was going scarlet under this merciless lashing.

"That's all right, just because I'm alone, without my fellows," leered Captain Fred, harshly.

"Well, our fellows haven't been doing a thing, except talking," retorted Wide. "Is that all your crowd are good at—talking?"

"I'll show you, one of these days!" growled Parsons.

"Show me now—right off! This fight is on again!" broke in Wide, vimfully, as he threw up his own fists and started in for his rival.

Fred was forced to fight back, or to take a thrashing tamely.

So he fought, his face working fiendishly with the anger that consumed him.

Wide landed one blow that cut Fred's lower lip.

The other young Washingtons stood about in a quiet ring, offering neither advice nor comments, for they knew that their leader could take very good care of his own interests.

"Nep! Nep! Nep! Neptune!" rose the battle cry up the street.

Seven of the Neptunes, headed by Big George Anderson, hove into sight up the street.

The instant that they saw the trouble they came forward on the run.

But Fred got caught, while turning to look, and now one of his eyes was nearly half closed.

"We'll soon see about this," he muttered, putting down his hands altogether and backing into the fence, well aware that Wide would not hit him without warning in this defenseless attitude.

The Neptunes were hauling off their coats as they ran, those who wore any.

Washington's little force did the same, tossing jackets over the fence into a yard.

Watching his chance, Fred darted away off up the street to meet his own crowd.

"You saw 'em!" he yelled. "Six to one! They'd have had a picnic if you hadn't come up. Now, come on and rush 'em! Give 'em something that folks will read about in history!"

"Nep! Nep! Nep! Neptune!"

"Wash! Wash! Wash the scalawags!"

The two lines came together at a slow charge.

As the Neptunes outnumbered their rivals by two, the latter tried their old trick of knocking out two at the first clash.

Wide chose Larry Downes for his, and got him, sending Larry down so "groggy" that that young gentleman lay on the ground, half sobbing.

Terry picked out Parsons, whom he had long wanted to hammer on an old grievance.

Joe also had his man marked, and got him, while Hal did as much for another.

Then, all in an instant, Big George found himself leading three Neptunes against a solid force of Six Washingtons.

The fight was of short duration.

Big George lay about him swiftly and heavily in all directions.

He was dangerous at all times. But Terry managed to land one in on Anderson's wind that put the big fellow out of commission.

Only two of the Neptunes were left uninjured to the extent that they could run away, which they very promptly did.

As Wide looked over the disabled ones near him he muttered:

"We ought to go in and give you fellows another trouncing! Won't you Neptunes ever learn to fight on the level, man to man?"

"You haven't got a—trace of a—kick—coming to you," panted Big George. "You did us up, anyway."

"There was no need for all this trouble, anyway," grumbled Wide, as he helped Anderson to his feet. "It all came out of my effort to insist that your captain must show some of the manners of a gentleman. That was all that was to be settled. If you fellows had been content to come along and just joint the ring, no one else would have been hurt."

"We won't rest easy till we do get you!" snarled Fred, mopping his injured nose with a handkerchief.

"If you fellows will only fight on the square, you'll never get us, and you know it," Wide retorted. "Anderson, you've been a fighter, and trained with ring people. Doesn't it make you ashamed to feel that you're traveling with a crowd that never dare fight man to man?"

"Sometimes," Anderson admitted, bluntly. "Especially when we attack with superior numbers, and then get licked at that!"

"Oh, you shut up, Anderson!" growled Fred.

"What's that, you little poppinjay?" questioned Big George, turning to stare at his captain.

"You dare to talk to me that way—me, the company's commander?" gasped Fred.

"I won't talk to you at all if you ever get fresh with me again," snorted Big George.

Fred paled with the fear that Anderson would leave the Neptunes.

What if he should go over and join the Washingtons?

Anderson, on his part, suddenly recollected where he got his living from.

He was able to live at home, but his parents could afford no spending money for him.

Though George would work hard by fits and spells, he was opposed to steady employment, for which reason the few dollars weekly that the wealthier boys of the Neptune crew raise for him came in mighty handy.

Wide led his Washingtons away, so that the Neptunes could fight out their own wrangles to suit himself.

"We could have had that big fellow, Anderson, in our crowd for the asking," hinted Joe.

"Forget it," smiled Wide. "Anderson is no real volunteer. Some of the Neptune boys keep a purse going for him."

"He'd be a handy addition to our crew, though," persisted Joe.

"I don't believe the fellows would have him if he offered himself," rejoined Wide.

Whenever Ted Lester had a new, big lot of spending-money come to hand he could be relied upon to be good to his friends.

Skip, of course, came in for some new hot-weather raiment.

Now, Skip, the former street waif, since he had fallen in love, was capable of appreciating the most stylish things in the mart.

Ted had fitted him out in a handsome, new, light mohair suit that Skip declared was "all de cheese" for wear in sweltering weather.

So, in the evening, Skip's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of Flossie Elwell, his little sweetheart.

He spent so much time in arraying himself before the glass that it was nearly dusk when he finally sallied forth from the engine-house.

He ducked down the back streets, in order to avoid any

comments from his friends in the company, and made his way to Flossie's abode.

"Why, the child just went out for a little walk about the neighborhood," Mrs. Elwell informed him. "You'll find her in two minutes if you look around in the nearby streets."

"Den, p'chee, it won't be fer want o' using me peeps," uttered Skip, as he went away at a dignified pace worthy of his handsome, new attire.

Bud Messner, his somewhat unlucky rival, was prowling about the neighborhood that night.

Though Bud had been turned down by Flossie of late, it wasn't in his nature to stay turned.

He saw Flossie coming, and braced up.

"Say, Floss, hullo!" he hailed, stepping out from behind a tree as she came up.

"Oh! How you frightened me!" half-screamed Flossie, as she drew back. "Good evening, Bud."

"Say, youse hain't handed me de mitt fer good, have youse?" Bud inquired, in a hurt tone.

"Why, what are you talking about?" Flossie asked.

"Well, p'chee, it looks like you was using Skip for yer steady, dis good old summertime."

"I see Skip very often, yes."

"And youse can't see nobody else w'en yere wid him, neider," Bud went on, crossly. "Dat ain't de square hand-out fer me."

"Why, I like Skip very much, of course," Flossie retorted. "And I like to be with him."

"'Course ye do. An' w'en I comes around, all I gets is de ice pitcher, an' lemons, an' dey don't make no sweet lemonade, neider! W'y can't youse give me de same kind er glad con youse hands to Skip? Say, ain't I as good as dat mutt?" Bud demanded, irritably.

"Why, I don't doubt you're a very nice young fellow, indeed," Flossie replied, as she walked along with "sore" Bud. "Only I can't go out with you both."

"W'y not—if ye've got to keep dat mutt in training part o' de time?" Bud insisted.

"It wouldn't look very well for a young lady to be keeping company with two gentlemen at once, would it?" Flossie replied.

Just at that moment Skip, coming softly around the nearest corner, caught sight of his hated rival with the dearest girl on earth.

Skip's eyes began to flame with a green light.

He could be a horribly jealous fellow at need.

"I t'ought I had dem dry goods cinched," he uttered, disgustedly, as he stepped back down the street, behind a shade-tree. "De foist time me peeps is toined de odder way dat mutt butts in, and Floss always seems to stand fer him. P'chee, she'd better take him fer her steady, den! Hanged if I'm goin' ter play fer second smile from any goil!"

In all of which, as the reader knows, Skip was doing his sweetheart a decided injustice.

But Skip didn't happen to know it.

He kept back out of sight as Flossie went by on the crossing, Bud sticking close to her, with the nerve of a bulldog.

"Well, let de dry goods travel wid de new steady!" raged Skip, as he came out from hiding and stared after the unoffending fair one going off with her unwelcome escort into the darkness. "I'll just hang eround here a bit. If dey comes back dis way, den I'll git a brace on, stiffen up, an' go by Floss, liftin' me hat just erbout er quarter of an inch. I'll say 'good evening, Miss Elwell,' just like dat. Den she can go home an' cry to herself some in her bunk durin' de foist hours of de night. Wot?"

Still boiling and quivering, Skip leaned against the fence, all his happiness in his new raiment gone for the time being.

Yet, try as he would to convince himself that he cared nothing at all, now, about Floss, the remembrance of her as she had passed, looking so lovely in a dainty fabric in which Kitty Lester had fitted her out, would flash across Skip's dreams of happier and Floss-less days to come.

Fifteen or twenty minutes went by, and still no Flossie came in sight.

The truth was, that having ridden herself of Bud soon after, Flossie had returned to her home in the hope that Skip would be there, or would call.

Skip had shifted from the fence to a post behind a tree.

As he glanced down the street, Skip caught sight of Wide and Kitty Lester coming toward him.

He saw them just as they passed under a street lamp, walking close together, holding hands and talking in low tones.

"Say dere's a couple er steadies dat never gits near trouble," sighed Skip. "Say, w'y couldn't I pick out a goil like dat?"

As the young couple, wholly interested in each other, came on out of the little circle of light thrown by the street lamp, watching Skip saw a man dart stealthily after them.

Skip was on the point of yelling, to raise the alarm, when he saw the scoundrel's arm uplifted, with a club.

There was an instant blow.

Wide fell.

Kitty Lester screamed.

The assailant broke into a fast sprint.

Skip said never a word, then, for the scoundrel was running right toward the ex-waif.

Skip, breathing hard, got a grip on himself as he whisked off his new coat.

"Stop, you scoundrel!" yelled Wide, who had gotten to his feet and was pursuing.

Skip crouched tight to the shadow of the tree, waiting.

Then, as the assailant passed, breathing hard, Skip lit out at him in a wildeat spring.

Over the fellow's head Skip threw the coat, winding it hard and twisting as he brought the fellow down to the ground.

Judson, for it was he, cursed and fought, but that coat,

wrapped over his head and shutting off his sight, hampered the wretch.

Skip held on grimly for a few seconds.

"Be still, pet!" coaxed the little fellow, as he hung on to his advantage.

Then up raced Wide, throwing himself across his prostrate foe.

While Skip still held the coat twisted, sack-like, over Judson's head, Wide choked the wretch until Judson lay quiet.

"Is this you, Miss Lester? What's the matter?" demanded a policeman, who had run swiftly up in answer to her scream.

"Hurry!" cried Kitty, pointing down the street.

A moment later Skip was released from further responsibility, for the officers had the nippers on his man.

"Good business, Skip!" cried Wide, jumping up and grasping the little fellow's hand.

Kitty had hastened along, stopping only to pick up the club, which Judson had dropped in his flight.

Wide explained that, just before the blow was truck, he thought he heard a stealthy step behind him, and turned.

Thanks to that turn, he got only a glancing blow, though it was enough to fell him, and now a lump was forming on his head.

"S'cuse me, Miss Kitty, but do youse t'ink dis coat can be mended?" queried Skip, hesitatingly, as, fiery red, he held out the garment to Wide's sweetheart.

Kitty held it up and looked it over, critically.

There was one big tear down the back, and a smaller one at the side.

"It can be mended, beautifully, Skip," Kitty declared, with an air of conviction. "If you'll let me, I'll take it home and mend it. I'll send it down to you in the morning."

"Oh, p'chee, I ain't taking youse fer no tailor!" Skip cried, in confusion. "I ain't going ter let youse do dat fer me. I didn't mean dat, honest to——"

A warning look from Wide checked Skip in time.

"But I'd really like to mend this coat. Won't you allow me to—please, Skip?"

"Oh, p'chee, if youse puts it dat way," stammered Skip, "youse know well enough dere ain't anyt'ing in de skies dat I wouldn't climb up an' pick for youse, Miss Kit!"

A very pretty speech, that was properly rewarded, for, the next morning, Miss Kitty "mended" the coat by sending Skip an entire new suit as good as the one whose coat he had spoiled in Young Wide Awake's service.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER A PRETTY SINNER.

Of course, Kitty Lester made a lot of anxious fuss about that lump on Wide's head.

She wanted him to see a doctor at once, or go to a drug store, or even let her bathe his head for him.

But Wide, having discovered that the skin was not broken

where the blow had fallen, assured her that the lump was going down every minute.

"We'll just finish out our little stroll, dear girl," he answered. "Then we'll join Terry and Faith up at the house, if they haven't left for a stroll of their own. And if they have, we know a quiet little nook out on the lawn, under the maples, where we can sit and chat. That's better for a sore head than all the bandages in the world."

"Is it very sore?" Kitty asked, anxiously.

"Why, I hardly feel it," Wide answered. "The soreness will all be gone in another hour. I'm satisfied to have a little lump like that, now that I know the scoundrel who did it is safe behind the bars."

"What a brave and quick little fellow Skip is," Kitty smiled, as she held up the torn garment entrusted to her care.

"That can't be mended, can it, Kit?"

"It can, one way that I know of," Kitty answered, demurely.

Wide said no more.

When they reached the Lester grounds Terry and Faith were nowhere to be found.

"Oh, they're having their little stroll, just as I thought they would," nodded Wide. "'Tis better so, any way, dear girl. We can have a longer time to ourselves—and so can your chum and mine."

"Say," uttered Kitty, with a sudden, mischievous smile, as they halted under the trees near their favorite lawn seats, "I'm going to ask you to excuse me a minute."

"I hope it won't be longer than a real minute," protested the young fire captain.

"I've just made up my mind to have fun with my new maid, Celeste Mignon," Kitty went on. "Celeste claims to be a very expert young needlewoman, and so far I haven't had anything for her to do. I'll run in and hand this coat to her and ask her if she can mend it in the morning so it won't show, even faintly, where the tears were."

"Do you want to drive your maid away at the outset?" teased Wide.

"What do you think of Celeste, anyway?" Kitty suddenly asked.

"She's a very pretty girl."

"Is that all you've noticed?" asked Kitty, with a pout.

"Well, I've had only a look at her, on two occasions, you know."

"I wish I had been able to get a fuller reference for Celeste," Kitty went on. "She's very obliging, and, if she's only honest, I think I shall like her very well. But now I'll run over to the house with this coat, for I want to see the surprised look in Celeste's eyes."

"Kit won't have that maid very long, I'm thinking," murmured Young Wide Awake to himself, as he sank into one of the lawn chairs. "A girl as pretty as that maid is sure to have some enterprising young fellow run off with her ere long."

Celeste was supposed to be about nineteen. She was a slender, very pretty girl, and somewhat tall.

Kitty was gone for some minutes. Then she came speeding back across the lawn.

"Oh, Dick!" she gasped. "Celeste is gone!"

"From your manner, I take it that you don't mean that it is simply the maid's evening out?"

"No, no!" Kitty cried.

"What has Celeste taken with her that didn't belong to her, then?" Wide asked, quickly, looking intently at his disturbed sweetheart's face.

"Every one of my jewels that wasn't locked in the safe," Kitty answered, nervously. "She had charge of my jewels, you know, Dick."

Wide whistled.

"Are you going to set the police after her, Kit?"

"It seems a dreadful thing to do, but I shall have to. Oh, I should have known better than to take her with so little in the way of reference. Dick, I almost feel as if I had made a thief of Celeste by letting her have charge of the jewels."

"If she hadn't been a thief, she wouldn't have been tempted," Wide retorted, drily. "Kit, did she have any company come here to see her?"

"Only one."

"A young man, of course."

"Yes."

"Then, if Celeste has taken your jewels, she must have taken them in order to run away with the young man. Who was he? Do you know?"

"Celeste called him Tom Dagmar."

"He was her sweetheart?"

"He must have been, for he came often."

"Find Tom Dagmar, then, and you'll probably find Celeste and the jewels," quoth Wide. "Blazes! I hope they haven't taken them direct to a 'fence' to sell!"

Terry and Faith came in at this moment.

"Oh, I do so hate to go to the police, and have all this publicity about it," cried Kitty.

"Perhaps," hinted Wide, "if we can get on the track of Celeste, and, particularly, Tom Dagmar, there may be no need to go to the police."

"Oh, if you could only manage it, Dick!"

"Terry and I will see what can be done," Wide replied. "Do you know where Tom Dagmar lived, or anything about him?"

"Absolutely nothing," Kitty answered.

"Then we'll have to bother the police a bit," Wide assured her. "I'll have to ask Chief Sharp if he has any information about Dagmar."

As they went into the house, Kitty ran to find her father, and tell him the news.

Mr. Lester promptly joined the young people as Wide rang up on the telephone.

He got Chief Sharp at the station-house.

Mr. Sharp had heard of Dagmar, and knew him by sight, but understood that he lived over in Norwich, or near there."

"He's a smart sort of slick young sport," Sharp informed our hero over the wire.

"Just the kind that would catch a foolish young girl?" Wide asked.

"Every time, I should say," the chief answered, "for Tom Dagmar is a good-looking, flashily dressed and rather swaggering young chap. If you want to know more about him, ring up the Norwich police, and see what they can tell you."

The Norwich police knew Dagmar well.

He had a chum, known as Bill Appleby, and the two were often in fights in Norwich.

These summer evenings the pair, who always seemed to have a fair amount of money, hung out usually at a beer garden in Norwich, known as "The Glen."

"It won't be a bad idea for Terry and I to go over there," Wide declared. "If we can find the girl with Dagmar, we may be able to persuade her to give the missing property back without any fuss."

"If she has foolishly disposed of one or two pieces already, but will give the rest back, you can assure her, from me, that she will not be prosecuted," broke in Mr. Lester. "I would hate to send such a young woman to prison to be herded among criminals. Make any promise, for me, that you think seems necessary, Halstead."

"Why don't you go with us, sir?" suggested our hero.

"If we found the girl anywhere, and she saw me coming, she would run away as fast as she could. She has seen so little of you two young men that Celeste might not suspect until you had gotten close to her. But look out for any desperate tricks from Dagmar and Appleby, won't you?"

Wide and Terry were quickly aboard a trolley car, which carried them over into Norwich.

There, after inquiring, they found their way readily enough to "The Glen," a rather cheap resort down by the river front.

This beer garden was a roomy open-air affair, fenced in, and with a housed saloon at one end of the grounds.

As the two young firemen stepped quietly in, a wheezy band was playing for the amusement of some two hundred people of both sexes, who sat at tables, drinking.

"There's Celeste, sure enough," murmured Wide, after a brief inspection of the faces in the place.

He told Terry where to look, and Rourke saw the pretty French maid for himself.

She was seated at a table, with another young woman, older and not so pretty.

With them were two rather sportily dressed young men, who, from the descriptions, the young firemen had no doubt were Dagmar and Appleby.

All four appeared to be having a jolly chat.

Dagmar and his chum were smoking.

Dagmar sat with one arm half around Celeste, who was keeping close watch on a little satchel that she carried.

"That's the bunch, all right," muttered Terry, as the two young men worked their way closer to that particular table without attracting any attention.

"The jewels must be in that satchel," Wide hinted.

"Av she hasn't stowed thim somewhere."

During a lull in the conversation at the table, Tom Dagmar took out a railway time-table and studied it.

"They're thinking of skipping somewhere to-night," Wide muttered.

Then they kept quiet, for they were moving closer.

While Dagmar studied the time-table, Celeste drew from the satchel a diamond and amethyst pin, which she held up before the eyes of the other young woman.

"You may put it on to see how handsome you look with it, if you want, Tessie," suggested Celeste.

But just at that moment a hand reached over and snatched the bit of jewelry away from the French girl.

There was consternation at the table.

"Miss Mignon," said Wide, gravely, as he hurriedly pocketed the pin, "will you go, under our escort, back to Mr. Lester, and hand him all that is now in that satchel? If you will, you will be able to do so without the disagreeable necessity of going there under arrest."

"Say, what's that you're talking of, you guy?" broke in Tom Dagmar, in a low, fierce voice.

"I'm not talking of you, Dagmar," Wide retorted, while Celeste, pallid and trembling, sat back in her chair, looking as if she were about to faint.

"But I'm talking to you," snarled Dagmar. "You've insulted me girl. You quit, and fade, or I'll cut you up some!"

"Don't waste any threats on us, Dagmar," Wide warned him. "I'm showing Miss Mignon how to avoid any nasty scrape."

"What's she got to avoid?" blustered Dagmar.

"If she'll take that satchel, with all it contains now, back to Mr. Lester, he'll make the point clear," Wide suggested, coolly.

"You're insulting me girl!"

"I'm telling her what's best for her," Wide retorted. "If she doesn't heed, I shall have to call a policeman, and——"

Dagmar leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing, while Celeste cried out in such alarm that scores of curious eyes were now turned their way.

"Fellow-citizens!" yelled Dagmar. "Here's two cheap con guys trying to work a graft on me girl! What shall we do with 'em? Rough-house?"

More than half of the people in the place were of a rough order.

In an instant things were moving lively in "The Glen."

Wide and Terry found themselves down at the bottom of a motley crowd of young toughs, who were pounding and kicking at them.

Two policemen rushed in from the outside, drawn by the racket.

After a good deal of clubbing and gruff ordering, the policemen got the crowd quiet.

Wide and Terry were dragged out of the mix-up, looking a bit the worse for their usage.

In the excitement that had prevailed, Dagmar and his companions had succeeded in vanishing from "The Glen."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT ON THE TRAIN.

"Here, you two youngsters, get out of here! You've kicked up trouble enough!" grumbled one of the officers, hustling Wide toward the gate.

The other helped Terry over the ground.

Neither of the young firemen was foolish enough to resist or argue, a course that might have resulted in their landing in a Norwich lock-up, at least until Celeste Mignon and her friend had had a chance to make good their escape.

"We'll let it go at that," muttered Wide, as they found themselves outside.

It was only two blocks to a starter's station on the trolley road.

"The trolley goes out to the Alton Street sub-station on the railway," Wide whispered, as the two young firemen hurried along. "It is quicker to reach the sub-station than the regular Norwich depot."

"Thin it's there they're headed for, Oi'm thinking," Terry rejoined. "Thot feller, Dagmar, was r-readin' a time-table in the beer garden."

At the starter's station the starter was fortunate enough to remember having seen the quartet board the car that had left a few moments before.

"Then it's the sub-station and a railway flight for them," Wide uttered, gleefully. "With good luck, Terry, we ought to be with that crowd soon."

They reached the Alton Street sub-station just in time to see a west-bound train rolling in.

And there on the platform, crowding to the steps, were Celeste and her friends.

So intent were these young people on boarding the train that they did not see the two pursuers.

Their first warning was when Young Wide Awake darted in on tiptoe, bounding up on the steps opposite and fairly snatching the satchel from Mlle. Mignon's hand.

Celeste screamed.

She and the girl went on the steps ahead of Tom and Appleby.

Dagmar caught Tessie by the waist and whirled her off. Celeste was next dropped to the platform in the same fashion.

Then, with a string of savage oaths, Dagmar leaped up into the car.

Appleby was right at his heels.

"Take the satchel, Terry," directed Wide, who was already in the car with his chum.

Then Wide faced the oncoming pair.

"Give that stuff back, or I'll open up your skin for you!" threatened Dagmar, savagely.

"Here, what's the row here?" shouted the conductor, coming in, followed by his brakeman.

"This guy did the strong-arm sneak trick on me girl,

and I'm going to cut him up!" yelled Dagmar, reaching for his pocket.

But the brakeman caught him before he could bring out a knife, hustling the fellow toward the door.

The conductor seized Appleby, growling:

"That's Captain Halstead, of the Belmont Fire Department, and no thief. If you want rough-house, have it down there on the platform."

There was a stiff fight, but Wide sprang to the aid of the trainmen, while Terry deemed it wiser for him to stand tight, with the recovered satchel, into which he pecked.

"The jewels are here, Wide!" he called, and our hero heard and understood.

After a stiff fight, the two young toughs were hustled from the train, which was just beginning to move.

Then the brakeman ran back through the car, just in time to head off an effort by Dagmar and Appleby to board the other end of the car.

At the end of the next car a brakeman, who had seen the rumpus, pushed Dagmar and Appleby away as they tried to board there.

The train rolled along toward Belmont, leaving Celeste and her discomfited friends in the rear, and beaten.

"What was the trouble all about, Wide?" asked the conductor.

"Nothing, except that we recovered Miss Lester's jewels from a maid who had run off with them," Wide explained, while Terry held open the satchel to display the treasures.

"I knew I wasn't making any mistake throwing those toughs off," the conductor nodded.

"We're mighty obliged to you," Wide declared, earnestly.

He and Terry examined the jewels, though without any clear idea whether all were here in the satchel. There were a lot of pretty pieces, at all event, and, among them, three rather costly diamond pieces.

Wide dropped into the lot the amethyst pin that he had snatched from Celeste at "The Glen."

As the train stopped at Belmont, the two young firemen descended from the train in a very contented frame of mind.

They boarded a trolley car and were soon at the Lester home.

"What! you haven't got them?" cried Kitty, delightedly, as she ran down the veranda steps to receive the satchel.

Mr. Lester, who had been sitting with the young ladies, looked highly pleased as he followed the young people into the house.

Kitty emptied the satchel upon a table in the reception-room.

She ran over the glittering heap, checking them in her mind.

"Everything here except a little turquoise ring, that doesn't matter," she cried, looking up, delighted again.

"The poor, foolish young woman who stole them!" sighed Mr. Lester.

Wide and Terry then recounted their adventures in getting on the track of the pretty thief and her companions, and in getting the jewels.

"Ted came in while you were away," laughed Faith Vane. "He went right upstairs to bed after he heard the news."

"Was that all the interest he took in his cousin's loss?" demanded Wide, astonished.

"He said, Dick," laughed Kitty, "that if you and Terry had gone after the jewels, he'd take a look at them in the morning."

Mistress Kitty was so highly pleased that she could talk about little else.

It was soon time for the young firemen to take their leave, as it was past the hour when they usually departed.

Belmont seemed to have turned in to sleep on this hot night.

The town had a deserted air. There were no other passers in sight as Wide and Terry left the car.

They started down Holmes Street, Rourke intending to leave our hero at the latter's gate.

"Lights out in the fire-house," discovered Terry, as they went by.

"Oh, yes; on a hot night like this folks want to get to bed and forget how close and hot it is," Wide replied.

Just before they reached the little Halstead house, four young men stepped around a corner.

"There they are—the pair of 'em!" Tom Dagmar's voice snarled.

Almost before the young firemen had time to realize what had happened, four young toughs had come down upon them with the suddenness of a cyclone.

It was a one-sided fight from the outset.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VITRIOL FIEND.

"Put 'em out of business, now—good and plenty!" rasped Tom Dagmar.

The four fought as if they were used to such assaults.

Wide and Terry, without a word, threw themselves back to back and did their best to stand off the beating that seemed bound to come to them.

Terry got an awful thump on the check.

Wide received a blow that staggered him and sent him down to his knees.

Just by good chance he fell so that he was able to wrap his arms swiftly around Dagmar's knees, and send that young tough over to the ground.

Then Wide leaped up again, but things were coming faster than he could stand.

Terry had begun to use his feet.

Still the fight was going all against them, and could not last much longer.

"Are you Washingtons?" yelled Joe's voice from down the street.

"Yes! Quick!" called Wide, pantingly.

He and Terry both got some more rough treatment ere Joe and Hal could reach the spot on a dead run.

These two young firemen hurled themselves into the scrap, and now it was a fair give and take.

Joe lay about him with the fury of a fiend.

Hal did his fighting as quietly as he did everything else, but he managed to land in several good blows on Appleby.

Like most fighting toughs, these young men from Norwich were at their best when the odds were all in their favor.

Now they began to weaken under the stress of furious battle.

A minute later they were in full retreat.

"Shall we run 'em down?" demanded Joe.

"No," urged Wide. "I've had about enough of it to-night. My fun came near beginning to-night with a broken head. For one, I'm sore all over."

"Divvle a bit betther can Oi say for mesilf," grunted Terry.

So the toughs were allowed to get away.

Had Wide suspected how much trouble this crowd was yet to give him, he would have voted for running them down, then and there.

"How did you fellows happen to be on hand at just the right moment?" Wide asked, curiously.

"I guess," laughed Joe, "that two fellows on their way home from seeing young ladies happened along in time to be of service to two other young fellows who had been away looking into soft eyes."

There was a laugh all around at that. They parted at Wide's gate, and, within half an hour, the last of the four was sound asleep in his bed.

The next morning was not far advanced when Skip received, from one of the Lester servants, a package containing his "mended coat."

He didn't know what to say when he saw the entire new suit.

So all he attempted to say was:

"P'chee! Wot?"

Wide, who came in just after, had to see that new mo-hair suit and duly admired it.

"Didn't you tumble, last night, Skip, that that was what was going to happen?" laughed our hero.

"P'chee! If I on'y had——"

"Well—what?"

"I'd a-trun a fit. De idea o' Miss Kit doin' a t'ing like dat fer a hobo like me!"

"She's satisfied, if you are, I guess," smiled Wide.

"Say, Wide, w'en ye see her next will youse hand her me tanks, done up in silk?"

"Surely."

Then Wide went down below, where some of the fellows were putting a few extra finishing touches on in cleaning and polishing the hand-engine and the hose-carriage.

Wide heard wheels stop before the engine-house door.

Then one of the fellows called out:

"Captain, a young lady to see you."

It was a slim, trim, well-dressed, graceful-looking girl who waited outside.

She had evidently come with a somewhat elderly man, who sat waiting in a buggy.

Wide could not see the young lady's face, as she wore a deep sun-veil.

"You are Captain Halstead?" she inquired, in a voice that had a pretty foreign accent.

"Yes," Wide admitted.

"Will you walk this way with me?"

Wide went with her a few feet past the engine-house door. He could feel that she was eyeing him intently through that veil.

"You did a very foolish thing last night," she murmured.

"Ah!"

"You did a great wrong to my sister, C  leste Mignon."

"How?" Wide asked, bluntly.

"You disgraced her."

"Disgraced a—pardon me—thief?"

"Ah, but she did not intend to be a thief!" quickly exclaimed the other.

"I wish I could believe you," Wide answered, coldly.

"She took those jewels because—well, she was foolish enough to wish to make it appear that the jewels belonged to her."

"Yes, it looked a great deal that way," Wide admitted, drily.

"Now, my sister has lost her position."

"I should say she had!" Wide ejaculated.

"You do not seem sorry."

"I am not."

"Why?"

The young woman's demand came passionately.

"Well, if Mlle. Mignon is an honest girl——"

"What! You doubt that?"

"Well, a good and honest girl shouldn't be in such company as Tom Dagmar can offer her."

"Ah! But he is a very fine and upright young man," contended Wide's visitor, wrathily.

"He must be," Wide uttered. "He and three other thugs assaulted us late last night. They acted like regular highwaymen. Now, Mlle. Mignon, I cannot blame you for defending your sister, Celeste. But I must decline to believe in Celeste. At the least, she was the victim of the bad company that she kept. Nor do I believe that your sister had any intention of going back to Miss Lester with the jewels."

"Ah! Then you would not speak the good word for my poor sister with Miss Lester?" demanded the veiled girl, anxiously.

"What! Most certainly I wouldn't. You would find that Mr. Lester wouldn't have your sister about the place, either. I am sorry, young lady, very sorry, but I think your sister will do very well to keep out of the way of the Lesters."

"It is all your fault!" cried the veiled girl, angrily.

"I decline to take the blame, anyway."

"You are a monster!" hissed the young woman.

"Am I?" smiled Wide. "I thought I was a high school boy, serving as a volunteer in the fire department. Now,

Mlle. Mignon, suppose we stop discussing your sister and her—unfortunate—act?"

"Beast!" cried the veiled one, spitefully.

Her voice sounded on the verge of tears.

When she fumbled in a reticule that she carried, Wide imagined she was fishing for a handkerchief.

"You shall know what it means to meddle with some folks!" quivered the veiled girl. "Every time, after this, that you look in the mirror you shall be sorry that you did not keep out of other folks' affairs!"

Her hand came out of the reticule, holding an uncorked bottle.

She did not give Wide time to see what the bottle looked like, nor did she delay an instant, but dashed the contents of the bottle into the young fireman's face.

Young Wide Awake staggered back, his face splashed with ammonia.

With a mocking laugh the veiled girl leaped into the buggy and was driven away.

But Wide paid no heed to her.

CHAPTER IX.

RIVALS IN VALOR, TOO.

As Wide darted back to the engine-house he let out a yell.

It was more the fear of what ammonia would do than actual suffering.

That yell brought out Joe Darrell, hose in hand.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" demanded Joe.

"Ammo——"

"Good Lord! Ammonia! Stand still!"

With one hand, Joe rammed Wide up against the wall.

"Turn on the water again!" he shouted.

Splash! The four-inch stream struck the side of Wide's face, where the liquid had wet the skin.

"Not quite so hard on the stream," Joe called.

Wide, at the moment of the throwing, had tried to dodge.

So quick was the French girl's move, however, that he could not entirely escape it.

By the greatest good luck none of the strong stuff got into his eyes.

Had it done so he undoubtedly would have been blinded.

"Hal, you're a fast sprinter," quivered Joe. "Go, on the jump, to dad's drug store for a bottle of olive oil. Don't stop to explain what you want it for, and don't let anything hinder you on the way. Hustle!"

With the water coming with little force, though full in volume, Joe continued to pour water over Wide's face.

"How do you feel, now, old fellow?" queried Joe, while the other Washingtons, hearing what had happened, stood apart in an awed group.

"It burns a bit—that's all," Wide answered.

"You bet it does," grumbled Joe. "Ammonia is hot stuff. But, oh, I'm thankful none of it got on the tender membrane of your eye! Let's see how it looks now."

Joe held the hose nozzle away for a moment.

"Red, of course, but the prompt sousing with water washed just about all the stuff away."

"I don't feel any agony over it," said Wide.

"Of course you don't. The water began to go on before it had time to get to work. The water washed it off."

"What hurts most people, then, when they get ammonia on their eyes?" Wide questioned.

"Why, they either don't think of water soon enough, or else it isn't handy. Nine people out of ten grab cloth of some kind and wipe it off, or try to. You were reaching for a handkerchief when I grabbed you, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," muttered Joe, grimly. "Well, with a cloth you get some of the liquid off, and rub the rest in. The instant the hose hit your face the ammonia became so weak that it could do no more harm."

Splash! Joe turned on the water again, just to be on the safe side.

"It's lucky you were here, Joe!" breathed Wide.

"Oh, I have my uses," Joe admitted, carelessly.

A few moments later Hal came dashing down the street with the oil.

"Open it," said Joe, briefly, while he continued pouring the water over the young captain's left cheek.

By the time that the oil was ready for use, Joe called out to turn the water off.

Then he led Wide into the engine-room and gave him a seat.

Next Joe applied the oil liberally to that left cheek, bathing it in as well as it would go.

"How do you feel now?" asked the amateur emergency doctor.

"The sting is beginning to leave since the oil was applied."

"Correct answer," Joe clicked, with a grave imitation of a professional air.

In ten minutes Young Wide Awake was able to laugh at the uselessness of the French girl's attack.

"Who was she?" demanded Hal. "That French girl of last night?"

"She said she was Celeste's sister, but it must have been Celeste herself," Wide answered.

"Humph! Av coorse it was," grifted Terry.

"Well, it's all right now, anyway," murmured Hal, with a sigh of relief.

In another hour, except for an occasional rather strong glow on his left cheek, Wide felt as well as before the ammonia-throwing.

But that was all due to Joe Darrell's promptness, and his knowledge of what to do.

No thought had been given to an effort to catch the French girl.

During the excitement, she had had too good a start in the buggy.

By this time a girl as clever in wickedness as she had shown herself to be would know how to hide, or how to disguise herself so as to hinder recognition successfully.

Naturally, the fellows wanted to talk about the matter, but at last Wide asked them not to mention it again.

Later in the morning, Wide reported the wicked attempt over the telephone to Chief Sharp.

In the afternoon there was a very full turn-out of young Washingtons at the engine-house, for, in the hot, lazy, droning days of the summer vacation, it was as pleasant a place as any to lounge.

In the middle of the afternoon the fire alarm clapper suddenly gave forth a sound.

"Do we get any ice cream after this, Ted?" demanded Joe, springing erect at the first sound of the round.

Ted shook his head, laughing, as he ran for his togs.

"That bunch of spending money is pretty near gone," he called back.

Within ten seconds after the first round was in, Washington No. 1 dashed out of the engine-house, heading up Main Street.

It was a call that Neptune No. 2 was also bound to answer, and our young friends were bound not to lose the honor of capturing the handier hydrant.

The box was nearer Neptune's house at that, but Washington, by some good running, had the short length of hose touched to the hydrant just as Neptune came flying around the nearest corner.

The fire was in the Wheatstone, a handsome four-story apartment house of stone.

The tenants of the eight different apartments had flocked to the sidewalk after snatching up the handiest things they could find—in many cases the most useless things.

As Wide turned to look at the fire he found that smoke was pouring freely through the windows at the front, and near the front, on the third floor. There was some smoke on the fourth floor, but, so far, the two lower floors appeared to have escaped taking fire.

"Bring the nozzle along on the jump!" he shouted, leading the way, with Ted and Terry at his heels. "Axe and pikemen forward, too. The rest hump yourselves on the pumping-bars at the word."

As Wide and his two closest followers rushed up the steps into the building, Fred Parsons followed them.

He was provided with an axe, but had no one to pass his orders if he found need to give any.

"Hurry up that Neptune hose!" bawled Captain Fred, just before he ran into the house.

Behind him came clattering the nozzlemen and axe squad of the Washingtons.

"Of course, they had to get here first," growled Fred, to himself. "Those fellows never know their place. This is my fire by rights!"

Wide threw open the door of the flat to the east and leaped in.

"Bring the Washington hose here!" he shouted, as he encountered the blaze, a furious one running from the middle to the rear of the apartment. "Ted, rush with the word for the stream!"

Fred stood looking about, while the Washington axe and pike men crowded in after the nozzle.

Smoke was coming out from under the doors of the west apartment, also, the fire having passed through one flat to the other at the rear.

Fred tried two doors, but found them both locked.

"The stupid idiots!" he growled, then fell to with his axe.

He had the door down just as the Neptune hose, with Big George and Brick Houston at the nozzle, came up.

"In here," ordered Fred. "Get to work lively."

Anderson and Houston passed their captain without a word, other members following, supporting the lengths of hose.

Fred stood aside to let them in. It was Anderson who bawled the word back for the water.

Splash! Neptune was at work.

Now Fred stepped inside the apartment. He found Anderson and Houston playing on a blazing wall and fast-going floor in the dining-room.

"Get it out here as quickly as you can," Fred directed.

"Then hustle the water back into the kitchen."

"We know about what we're doing," Big George retorted, coolly. "You watch us."

"I'm captain of this company," Fred retorted, tartly.

"Oh, are you?" muttered Brick. "Well, that's all right as long as you keep out of our way and don't hinder."

Fred turned to find his lieutenant, Larry Downes, looking straight and hard at him.

Was Larry secretly grinning at him? Fred began to feel hot, though he felt that this was not just the time to start a row.

"We want our axemen up here, Larry," Fred said, quickly, as he heard the Washington axes ring out in the apartment opposite.

"There ain't a blessed thing for 'em to do on this side of the house," Big George responded, quietly.

Downes didn't stir.

"Will you order the axemen up, Larry?" demanded Fred, sharply. "Or shall I have to go?"

"Oh, I don't care. We don't need any axemen here, just as Anderson says," Larry retorted, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Captain Fred was becoming furious.

He just ached to stamp out this mutiny in his company, but he didn't quite know how.

He feared, in his innermost soul, that if he tried to take abrupt command and quell all mutiny, he would only be hustled out by Big George and the tough, Brick Houston.

So he gulped down his rage and stood watching, mutely, resolved to nip the next sign of mutiny in the bud.

"Stop playing on that wall, now, and get the stream to the kitchen door," Fred ordered, at last.

Big George half-turned his head to give his captain a wondering look. Then he and Brick went on playing just where they were.

"See here, you fellows," uttered Fred, hoarsely, "I'm captain of this company, and I intend to command. If you

don't want to follow orders the instant you get 'em, then get out of here, and out of the company, for I'll lay charges of mutiny against you with the chief. Now, follow orders—or git!"

He stepped forward, his face flaming with passion.

Anderson whispered to Brick. Then, without a word, that redoubtable pair pulled the hose toward the kitchen door.

"Now, get the axemen, Larry, for work in this room," roared Fred, turning upon his crony.

Larry chose to obey, without comment.

Soon Fred was satisfied that he had his company working to the best advantage.

He hadn't more than a third as much fire to fight, anyway, as the Washingtons had.

"Keep them hustling here, Larry," ordered Fred, then turned and left the apartment, for the smoke and fumes were thicker than was to his liking.

He reached the foot of the stairs just as Wide came darting out from the other apartment.

Our hero paused at the foot of those stairs for a moment, glancing anxiously up.

Up above, the smoke was thick. Just as the two young captains peered up a narrow tongue of flame shot out on the stairway.

"There's some one up there," breathed Wide, anxiously. "I heard a thump-thump-thump over my head in there."

"Any one up there would have sense enough to go to a window to call, wouldn't he?" sneered Fred, disagreeably.

"A bed-ridden person couldn't," Wide replied, shortly.

Then he started to ascend the stairs, swiftly, not pausing, as he called back:

"Want to come up here with me, Parsons?"

"If he saves any one, and I don't go, too, there'll be another hero wail over this upstart," flashed through Fred's mind, swift as a flash.

Fred didn't like the looks of the job, with another tongue of flame shooting up through the stairs.

Yet he dashed up, resolving, in a frenzy, that he would show Belmont people that he could go anywhere and do anything that Young Wide Awake could do.

Thanks to their speed, both got by the burning portion on the stairs.

It was to one side of the staircase, which gave them a chance to get around it.

As Fred's feet touched the landing above, Young Wide Awake was pushing open a door in the east flat up there.

Fred dashed in after him.

On a bed in an inner room lay an aged woman, her knees drawn up, her face distorted with terror.

In one hand she held a cane, with which she had been pounding on the floor.

"Oh, I thought you would never hear—would never come!" she sobbed, hysterically. "I was all alone, and waked up. Oh, it is dreadful!"

"You're all right now, though, madam," Wide assured her, cheerily.

From his belt he whipped out a thin but strong rubber blanket that was folded there.

"Help me, Fred," he said, quietly. "Now, madam, we're going to wrap you in this blanket, for any cloth showing might catch fire on our way down."

"Are the stairs afire?" quivered the old lady.

"Flames are just showing there. But it's nothing we firemen are not used to. Just keep cool, madam, and you won't be in a particle of danger. We'll have you on the street in a jiffy, and then in another house."

As Wide spoke he wrapped the wasted old form tightly in the blanket, with her bed robe and a sheet tucked tightly around her under the rubber.

"Now, see how fast we can be," smiled Wide, "and how safely we can carry you."

"Oh, but you're splendid, manly young fellows," quivered the old lady, as Wide lifted and bore her from the room.

"Let me have her!" cried Fred, jealously, leaping forward.

Wide indifferently surrendered his burden. He did not care who saved the old lady, provided she escaped with her life.

Just as Fred took her she fainted. They had just come to the head of the stairs.

On that staircase the flames were getting more headway. They might pass now, but in another sixty seconds it would be impossible.

"Did you hear what she said as she fainted?" demanded Fred.

"No; what?"

"Her grandchild, a baby, is asleep in one of the rooms back there."

Without a word, Wide turned and dashed back.

Fred sped down the stairs, passing the flames at one side like a streak.

"It's up to Halstead to find out what to do when he discovers there ain't any child up there!" muttered the coward.

CHAPTER X.

TEN MINUTES OF THE FIREMAN'S LIFE.

In justice to Fred Parsons, it must be admitted that, at least, he had no deliberate thought of sending our hero back to his death.

"It'll do him good if he gets a jolly big scare!" was the thought of Neptune's captain, as he darted down the remaining flights of stairs, with the wasted, light old form in his arms.

"'Rah for Neptune!" yelled two of his own crew, as Parsons appeared in the street with his burden.

Others cheered, too.

Fred began to feel some of the vanity of the make-believe hero.

"It's hot up there on the hot floor, you'd better believe," he observed, as he bore the old lady to where others could attend to her.

"Parsons has got the right kind of stuff in him, after

all," remarked some one in the crowd, and Fred's chest swelled a bit.

"Oh, that was nothing," he said, carelessly. "A little fire to pass—that was all."

"Where's Young Wide Awake?" asked a man, curiously.

"Oh, he's somewhere up there," Fred returned, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"He won't be down here in the street if there's any one to save, or anything else that needs to be done," added the inquirer, turning away.

In the meantime, our hero darted back into the apartment from which the old lady had been rescued.

He ran from room to room, looking even in the unlikely places, but no sign of a child or baby could he find.

Then he rushed through again, in one last, quick search, while the smoke poured up between the cracks in the floor.

"Must have been some mistake," he muttered.

Then it occurred to him that the old lady might have meant the apartment across the hallway.

As Wide passed the head of the stairs, in the hallway, he glanced down.

The stairs were afire now, at one point, to such an extent as to make passing difficult, if not impossible.

"I've got to be quick!" he uttered, as he sprang at one of the doors opposite.

He tried three in succession, but all were locked.

Glancing about him in a hurry, he luckily espied the axe that Fred had dropped at the moment of taking the old lady.

Armed with that, Young Wide Awake assaulted the lightest-looking door of the apartment.

After some moments he had it down, and sprang inside. Swiftly, he raced from room to room.

In one of the rooms, toward the front, he paused, with a gasp of horror.

On the floor lay a man, in bed garments, face down.

He was white, and looked lifeless.

"Poor fellow!" throbbed Wide. "Ill in bed, apparently, and tried to get out. Fainted, and here he was. Gracious! He's no lightweight, either."

Our hero did not stop to feel the man's pulse.

That would take too many precious seconds.

Instead, he lifted his man, fairly staggering under the load.

"Gracious! Can I ever get this man down the stairs?"

Surely not, for when the young fire captain now reached the head of the stairs, swaying under his heavy burden, he found half a dozen steps of the staircase wrapped in fast-devouring flames.

"Wash! Wash! Washington, here!" yelled Wide, at his loudest.

Ted heard and ran to the foot of the stairs, peering up through the smoke.

"That you, Wide?"

"Yes; with an unconscious man!"

"Wait a moment!"

Ted vanished, like a streak of lightning.

Then several helmeted heads appeared below.

"We're bringing the hose," shouted Terry, from below. Splash! sputter! hiss!

Washington's stream was playing hard on the staircase, some of the spray striking our hero and his burden.

Crash! The center of the blazing part of the staircase caved in, and heavier tongues of flame shot up.

Passing was impossible, now. More than that, the whole upper floor of the house seemed a doomed prey to the flames.

As Wide stood there he heard the fire alarm going outside. Chief Pelton had turned in another alarm to bring Torrent No. 1 to the aid of Belmont's young fire-fighters.

"We can't reach you!" wailed Terry. "There's not a ladder that'll go up, either."

Wide's heart sank, though he answered, coolly:

"All right! I'll find a way out. You'll get my orders in the street."

Those below, looking fearfully up, could just make out Wide through the thick smoke, as he turned away from the blazing staircase, with his heavy, helpless load.

Young Wide Awake had no trouble finding the door of the passage to the roof, but it was locked.

"My confounded luck to-day!" he grunted, as he swiftly laid his burden on the floor and ran back for that handy axe again.

The smoke was beginning to grow stifling, even to the trained young fireman's lungs.

Clatter! smash! crash! He cut away around the lock, swinging the door open.

Then, dropping the axe, he ran back to where the man lay.

Picking up his burden again, Wide made his way down the corridor.

Now came the hardest part—getting his great burden up those stairs.

How he accomplished it, Young Wide Awake hardly knew.

But at last he appeared on the roof, panting, straining, all but ready to drop.

Yet he staggered along until he was able to lay his burden on the roof close to the front edge.

Then Wide, crawling on his knees, for he felt weak and dizzy, after that strain, peered down into the street.

The instant that his head showed, Terry sighted him and called up.

Unslinging the trumpet that hung at his back, Young Wide Awake called down:

"I want to see if I can make my life-line reach you. If it does, tie another one to it."

Terry nodded. Wide uncoiled the life-line that had hung at his belt.

He lowered, quickly. The bottom end of the line dangled twenty feet above the heads of those who watched his experiment.

"And I've got nothing left to piece it out with but my trumpet-cord," groaned the young fireman.

As that was the best he could do, he did it. The cord pieced his line out by nearly four feet.

That still, however, was above the reach of those in the street below.

"Wait, Wide! I've got an idea!"

It was Terry who bawled this up, through Hal's trumpet.

Then our hero saw his chum run over to where Chief Pelton stood.

That official nodded, swiftly, as Rourke explained something to him.

Then, as orders rang out, our hero saw the men of Tom Scott's Hook and Ladder No. 1 run off one of their ladders, and another.

The first was run up into the air, many hands holding it aloft.

Against it, slantingly, another and shorter one was placed.

Men spectators came through the fire lines to aid in the scheme which Young Wide Awake now understood.

By using the shorter ladder as a brace to the longer, they got the two standing in the air like a letter "V" upside down.

As nearly a score of men braced the two swaying ladders, light little Skip raced up the longer ladder.

It was ticklish, but Skip had very little notion of the idea of fear.

Now Skip was waving his one arm to our hero, while he held on with the other.

Wide made another cast with his line. Skip caught it, tying a second life-line to it.

Then, as the nimble little ex-waif ran down to the ground, Wide called, through his trumpet:

"Another and heavier rope, now. Quick, too, for it's going to blaze up here soon!"

The crowd watched, breathlessly, as they saw Wide hauling up on his life-lines.

"Send up a seven-foot board at the end of the rope," he shouted down once more.

They got one, somewhere, somehow, in a hurry.

Wide, having got the life-lines up, now began pulling on the rope, to the lower end of which the board was tied.

"What's his idea?" asked one excited man of Chief Pelton.

"I don't know," replied the chief, briefly. "If you wait, you're pretty sure to find it's a good one."

Young Wide Awake had the board, and now began his hardest work.

Working like a beaver, handling that heavy, still unconscious man, our hero managed to tie him securely to the plank.

This he did because he felt certain that a weak, ill man would hardly survive the strain of a rope cutting around his lungs.

Wide now knotted the two life-lines together. One end he lashed securely, though in feverish haste to the plank.

There was a metal stanchion nearby, from which ran a

heavy wire supporting one of the big chimneys of the building.

As Wide passed the life-line around this he heard the sound of Torrent's running-bell in the street below.

"Whew! I've been a long time about this," uttered the young fire captain, not even pausing to wipe away the perspiration that poured down his face.

Fastening the life-line about his own body, Wide ran back to the roof edge.

Now, with a tight grip on the life-line, our hero began to shove the plank over.

It shot free at last. Though Wide looked for it, the jerk nearly yanked him off his feet.

But the passing of the line around the metal stanchion served much like a pulley.

Wide was able to pay out the rope slowly around the stanchion—that is, as slowly as he wanted to, for he was aware that the plank must pass some flame on its way down.

Splash! He heard the play of Torrent's stream, and knew that that deluge of water was protecting his man all that was possible.

He paid out a little faster, watching the length of life-line slip through his hands.

Suddenly the pulling on the line ceased.

Young Wide Awake's heart almost stood still.

The life-lines were fireproof, but the rope wasn't. Had fire eaten its way through the rope and dashed the unconscious one to death in the street?

Wide felt dizzy and weak as he hurried to the front edge of the roof.

As he peered down his pulses danced again.

He had forgotten the great length of his line.

Down in the street, people were casting off the rope and freeing the unconscious one who had arrived safely.

"How are you going to get down yourself, captain?" bel-lowed up Chief Pelton, through his trumpet.

Those looking up saw Young Wide Awake crouching there, framed by the smoke that poured up around him.

"Run out a life-net," Wide called down, calmly. "It's my only chance."

A score of the biggest, strongest men there leaped forward to hold the net.

Then he stood up. He had been worn out, but in this crisis of the last act a new, brief strength came to him.

It was such a splendid sight as he stood there that the crowd could not help sending up a cheer.

"Silence!" thundered Chief Pelton, who understood more than the intense dramatic interest in the scene. "Don't make any sound that can confuse him!"

Wide saw the net, at last, just where he wanted it.

Then, trumpet in hand, he made his leap.

It was a long one, that carried him far out—a fearful one, too, on account of the great height from which he was leaping.

It seemed minutes to the thrilled onlookers as they watched that slim young body shoot down.

Bump! He was in the net at last.

Holding their breath, the onlookers waited, not once stirring.

Bound! Wide was up and over the side, smiling.

He was weak, but Terry's arm was around him in a jiffy.

Then how the cheers broke loose, while Chief Pelton sprang forward, gripping his young captain's hand.

Fred Parsons felt burning up with envy.

Yet he had to admit, to himself, that he had made this tremendous ovation to the rival young fire captain possible.

"You must have misunderstood the old lady about the baby that was back there, Fred," our hero observed.

"What baby?" demanded Fred, paling a little. "I didn't say a word about one."

"You surely did. But it turned out to be a grown man, instead, and in the other apartment."

"I didn't say a word about any such thing," Fred retorted, stubbornly.

Young Wide Awake glanced at his rival with a sudden gleam.

"Fred Parsons, did you deliberately send me back there on a false hunt?"

"I didn't send you at all, or tell you anything to make you go," Fred insisted.

"What a magnificent liar you are, Captain Parsons!" Young Wide Awake uttered, coldly.

He turned on his heel to walk away.

Fred gripped his trumpet tightly. He would have leaped after his rival, striking him over the head, only he didn't dare.

In its temper at that moment the crowd would surely have handled Neptune's captain roughly.

Then Wide, feeling that he needed a few minutes' relief from duty, walked over to the fire lines.

"How is he?" asked Wide, as he overtook the four men bearing the man on the plank.

At that moment the sick man opened his eyes. He had been well drenched by water during the descent, and at last the cold shock had revived him.

As the man's eyes opened, Wide saw them encounter the gaze of a woman standing in the crowd.

That woman was Mrs. Wright.

Between her and the sick man on the plank a swift but queer look was exchanged.

Then the sick man was carried on by to a doctor's office.

"Do you know him, madam?" murmured Wide, in a low voice in her ear.

"Know him?" repeated the woman, hoarsely. "That wretch was responsible for my husband's ruin. He is our arch enemy! That wretch stands between my little child and her right to be with her father!"

CHAPTER XI.

A LOVELY FIEND FOR A JUDGE.

The fire was out at last.

A good deal of damage had been done to the upper two

floors, but the two lower floors were practically undamaged, save for water.

"That was a splendid job," confided the owner, a Mr. Carson, to a neighbor. "I feared it would be a total loss, but as the building stands now, the insurance will repair it for me."

Joe, as he helped reel up the hose, grumbled laughingly to Terry:

"There won't be an ice cream feed at the end of this job, anyway."

Mr. Carson happened to be near enough to overhear.

"Won't there, though?" that gentleman inquired of himself. "The young Washingtons did the brunt of the work here. There'll be a little feed for the Torrents, too, but as for the Neptunes—bah!"

Mr. Carson hurried away.

By the time that the young Washingtons had finished putting up their apparatus a caterer stood in the doorway.

"Mr. Carson's compliments, young gentlemen. My wagon is bringing along the ingredients of an ice cream feed."

"Wow!" uttered Joe. "He must have overheard me."

"Then, bully for you, Joe—that's all!" cheered Slam Bang, running his tongue out over his lips as the caterer's wagon turned the corner.

"Mr. Carson's orders, young gentleman," announced the caterer, as he helped to pass the cream and cake in the hall above, "are to see that you're supplied until not one of you can hold another mouthful."

"Faith, is he a very rich man?" demanded Terry, looking up from his plate.

"Why?" smiled the caterer.

"Shure, he'll be a bankr-rupt, av he's not wealthy," retorted Terry. "He's niver had the pleasure—or the agony—av seeing Slam Bang stow away stuff."

Slam made no reply. He was busy, already, with his third plate.

"Wow! And the strawberries and cream, too!" uttered Slam, ecstatically, as he saw more of the caterer's treasures uncovered.

"Sorry you didn't save more room, young man?" laughed the caterer.

"Oh, I've got room enough," retorted the young man, complacently, through a big mouthful. "All I'm wondering is whether the stuff will hold out."

Never had a more generous spread been offered.

The caterer sent for more as often as he found his supply running low.

Only once did Slam have to wait, for a few minutes, while a fresh can of mixed ice cream was being waited for.

Then Slam got busy again. After half an hour he was the only one left waiting.

"Got a few more cans of ice cream and another peck of berries?" inquired Slam, as he took a rest just long enough to put the question.

Yet at last even the prize eater of the company was satisfied, for the time being.

"Here's a little two-quart can, in case you find more room

after a while," smiled the caterer, turning more ice cream over to Slam, just before he left.

"Well," sighed Wide, contentedly, after the caterer had gone, "we won't any of us be good for any supper to-night."

"Oh, I don't know," grunted Slam.

"Let's see how fast ye can sprint to the corner now," teased Terry.

Slam smiled amiably, then settled back in a chair in the corner for a snooze.

"Whin he wa-akes up," said Terry, looking with a sort of awe at the big eater, "Slam'll go home to see av his supper's r-ready."

Tired, and their stomachs full, none of the fellows cared much about stirring until it was nearly home supper-time.

Then, by twos and threes, they straggled off homeward to explain why they didn't care about meals—all, that is, with the possible exception of Slam Bang.

Wide went into the house to make his excuses to his mother, then came out again, standing by the front gate.

He had not been there long when a young man came hurrying around the nearest corner.

"Say," he hailed, "I wish you'd come down the street and look at a chap I've found. I can't make out whether he's drunk or dead."

"Why don't you get a doctor, then?" Wide queried.

"Humph! He might get turned over to the police if he's only drunk. I don't want to see even a stranger get in quod for nothing but a little, quiet spree. Come along, won't you, and tell me what you think of the fellow?"

That didn't seem such a strange request, so Wide turned out through the gate and walked along with the young man.

The distance proved to be about a couple of blocks.

Then the young man led the way up an alley.

"I've got the poor codger in the stable here," he murmured.

"Do you smell liquor on him?"

"Nope. Not much, anyway."

"May be a case of sunstroke," Wide hinted.

"He's right in here," declared the young man, leading the way into the stable.

He conducted our hero into a sort of harness-room.

There on the floor, lying on a folded blanket, was another young man.

"Why, he's got a good color," declared Wide, bending over the seemingly unconscious one.

There was a stealthy step behind.

Then a newcomer on the scene struck the young fire captain a quick blow on the head.

As Young Wide Awake pitched and went down on his face, the supposedly stricken one leaped to his feet, grinning.

There were four in all in the room, now, besides luckless Wide.

Two of them were Tom Dagmar and Bill Appleby.

"You didn't kill him, Gus?" demanded Tom, in a whisper.

"What do you think?" demanded the one addressed as

Gus, in a hurt tone. "Think I don't know how to handle a sand-bag any better than that? Hustle with him! He'll be around in two or three minnutes."

Hustle the four young scoundrels certainly did. They gagged Wide, bound him, and lay his body in the bottom of a covered wagon.

Dagmar and Appleby, grinning, climbed in and lay beside our hero.

Gus covered them carefully with a long canvas. Then he and the one who had decoyed Wide hitched a horse into the wagon and drove out.

As a piece of sheer impudence, they drove by Wide's home and the fire-house of Washington No. 1.

"There's the mascot of Washington No. 1," grinned Gus, calling the attention of his companion on the seat to Trot, as the coach dog lay before the fire-house.

"He ain't working, then," declared the other; in a low tone. "That dog ought to be more on his job. The young feller we've got in behind sure needs a mascot!"

Just then Trot half rose, thrust his nose upward and let out a short, dismal howl.

"Who says the dog ain't on the job?" demanded Gus. "Mighty knowing critters, dogs is!"

Wide's daze lasted longer than Gus had expected.

When our hero came out of his stupor he knew, first of all, that his head ached fearfully.

In the next rush of dawning understanding, he discovered that he was gagged and bound, and lying under a canvas.

What did it all mean?

He struggled to remember.

Then it all came back to him, that decoying to the stable.

"Oh, what a fool I was!" quivered the young fire captain. "This must be Dagmar's gang that are doing this. A gang that has women who'll throw ammonia must have men that'll do anything fiendish they can think of!"

His soul was sick with the dread of it.

From the jolting of the wagon, now, and the fact that his feet were slightly higher than his head, Wide judged that the vehicle was toiling up into the hills to the west of Belmont.

"Whew! But they've got me right now!" throbbed Young Wide Awake. "It's only a question of how far their nerve will go. There's nothing to stop them."

At last there came a turning, and then the wagon went forward more easily over grass.

"We must be about there," thought alarmed Wide, "wherever 'there' is!"

Then the wagon stopped, and the voice of Celeste Mignon called softly:

"Have you got him?"

"Now, what do you think we'd be here for with the wagon if we hadn't got him?" demanded Tom Dagmar, for that worthy and Appleby had gotten out from under the canvas when the vehicle was well past the city of Belmont.

"Oh, then, be quick!" called the French girl, clapping her hands. "I am car-razy to see the young fellow!"

"Young fellow! Humph!" growled Tom.

The canvas was thrown off, and Wide was hauled out, shoulders first.

It was dark, but Wide could make out the white walls of an old house perhaps thirty yards away.

"Oh, yes, you have him! He's the real thing!" laughed Celeste, delightedly. "Hullo, Halstead!"

Celeste laughed gaily, as she gazed down into Wide's face as Gus and Appleby carried him toward the house.

"Now, quit that nonsense, Celeste," growled Dagmar.

"Oh, he is such a young fiend!" cooed the French girl. "You shall see me make up to the young captain! Such fierce friendship! Bah! He would prefer ammonia again."

"I don't know but what ammonia would be about the best thing now," growled Dagmar. "We could see to it that he didn't get a chance to get it off his face—or out of his eyes."

"Maybe," mocked the French girl. "But wait till you see what I shall do first. Then, if you are not satisfied, my vairee dear Tom——"

Celeste went off into a peal of mocking laughter as Tessie came out of the house, looking curiously at the captive, then muttered a savage:

"Humph! That's the guy that spoiled our trip by hooking the jewels back again."

"For which we shall vairee sweetly reward him," rippled Celeste. "Oh, you shall see how we will pay him back, Tessie, dear!"

As they passed into a room of the house, which was half-lighted, and Gus and Appleby roughly dumped the young fire captain on the floor, Tom broke in with:

"Now, then, Celeste, whatever you're going to do, do it and have it done with."

"Oh, but that would be too much haste!" cried the villainous girl, mockingly. "Don't you think so, too, Halstead?" demanded Celeste, bending over Wide.

Then, by way of added mischief, she bent still lower and tapped our hero on the forehead with her knuckles.

Wide shuddered, as if touched by the clammy coil of a snake, but Celeste laughed merrily as she stood up.

"Come, quit this foolishness!" snarled Tom Dagmar.

"Oh, you must not be impatient to-night, dear Tom!" cried the girl. "Wait until you have a chance to see how much you would like to be in this young man's place! But first the supper and the wine. We should be merry when we enter upon such a pleasant task."

At the further end of the room a table was already spread with food. There were also wine bottles and glasses.

Gus brought in a hammer and two staples. These he drove into the wall.

Then he and Appleby raised Young Wide Awake, securing him to the wall, where he must look on the feast unless he turned his head.

"It is gr-r-reat shame to keep that dirty rag in his mouth," trilled Celeste, gaily, "so that he cannot have any

of the wine. Poor wretch! He will be so thirsty watching us!"

Some of the tormentors were not exactly gay when they seated themselves at the table, but they soon became so under the influence of the wine as it passed about.

For an hour or longer they ate and drank.

Then, finally, at the close of it all, Celeste tripped lightly over on her toes, regarding Young Wide Awake's blanched face with mocking, laughing eyes.

"What a fiend she is!" thought Wide, with a shudder.

Celeste caught sight of that shudder and laughed again, for the wine had made her rather silly.

"Now, little boy," she mocked, as she shook her fist in his face, "we shall decide how to reward you for your kindness to us. Just think, I am to be judge and jury for you."

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

"Let's get this thing over with!" ordered Tom Dagmar, angrily. "What are you stringing it out so for, Celeste?"

"Oh, it would be a shame to spoil it all by hurry!" pouted the French girl.

"Get at what you're going to do, or I'll show you another way of doing it all in a minute!" growled Tom.

"Let me see," mused Celeste, mockingly, one slim, pretty forefinger resting against her nose. "What shall we do? Have you any choice?"

Though there was laughter in this fair fiend's voice, there was a gleam in her eyes that made Wide more afraid of her than he had ever been of any man.

"Cut it all out, I tell you, girl!" raged Tom Dagmar. "Get on the job! Get to business!"

"Oh, vairee well, then. If you hurry me so, then I will hasten myself to accommodate you, my dear Tom!"

Laughing, gaily, Celeste darted into the next room.

Then she called back, in pretended terror:

"Oh, it so vairee dark in here that I am much afraid. Won't one of you kind gentlemen bring a light?"

Growling, Dagmar drew out a match-box, following her into the next room.

"It's about toime thot this picnic br-breaks up!"

As that angry voice roared through the house, Celeste uttered a real scream and darted back to the door, followed by Tom Dagmar.

At every open window stood a young member of Washington No. 1.

Others were thronging in through the short hallway.

Tessie's screams were now added to the din.

"Get out of here——"

Tom Dagmar roared that command, hoarsely, as he sprang forward, reaching for his hip-pocket.

But Terry and Hal met him promptly, both banging him with clubs before he had time to draw any weapon.

As Dagmar fell, they threw themselves upon him.

The other three young men started to make a lively mix-up in the effort to break their way through.

Whack! whack! whack! The young Washingtons laid about them as if they fancied themselves an axe brigade.

It was all over in a jiffy, for there were fourteen of the young Washingtons there, not counting Trot, who, with his tail out and his hair bristling, was growling in a low, muttering way.

Every one of the four young toughs now had at least one young fireman seated astride of him.

Celeste, cat-like, and her eyes gleaming like coals, tried to slip through the excited throng.

She got as far as the sill of one of the open windows when Terry flew at her, seizing one of her slim wrists.

"What! You would do that to a woman?" cried Celeste, tearfully.

"Now, see here, me young Frinch lady," retorted Terry, gruffly, "it'll only ma-ake us laugh av yez thry to claim anny privileges on account av yure sex!"

Swift as a flash, Celeste Mignon thrust her free hand into her bosom, drawing forth a long, sharp knife.

But Joe caught her other arm, and, soon enough, Celeste was willing to surrender the knife.

Then, holding her arms behind her, while she raved and tried to fight, they quickly tied her wrists.

"You won't be hurt any worse than you make necessary yourself, Mademoiselle Mignon," Wide called, as soon as he could use his voice.

"Oh, but this is a shame—outrage!" screamed Celeste. "I was never used like this before."

"Ye may be used wor-rse hereafther, av yez don't mind yure ways," Terry grunted.

The girl Tessie had crouched in a corner, sobbing and shaking, and causing no trouble.

Yet Joe and Hal decided that it would be safest to tie her wrists.

"How on earth did you fellows find me out here?" demanded Wide, as the young vistsors paused from their efforts. "This must be four miles from Belmont."

"All av that," Terry agreed, promptly. "But we came on our bikes. Ye see, Wide, Hal and me was standing on the shtreet, whin along comes Trot, galloping as though he'd seen a ghost and been touched be it. Whin he sees us, Trot begins t' jump up and down and yelp like an auctioneer. Wid that we knew something was wrong. Whin we thried to go to the engine-house, Trot wud grab us be the clothes we had on, and thry t' lead us in the other dir-rection. So thin we knew something was up that needed attintion!"

"Trot must have seen the wagon out there, when you were being carried through Belmont," Hal went on. "That is, if you were brought here in that wagon."

"I was," Wide nodded.

"Then Trot must have scented you and followed. Anyway, I know Trot was wild—simply wild. We hurried to your house to get you, and found that your mother didn't know where you were, and was wondering. We didn't tell her anything, but we hustled to the engine-house, turned in the house call, and waited until the first fellows showed

up. Then there was a hurried scampering for bikes, and we were under way fast. Trot led the way, barking like mad at first, and making every one on the streets stare.

"Well, after we got out in the country we halted just long enough to cut clubs. Trot was wild over the delay. When we mounted again, he led us, with his nose to the ground, like a bloodhound, and never a yelp out of him. When we got to the foot of the slope yonder, Trot halted, pointed his nose to this house and whined low. Then we dismounted and came prowling forward. But the softest and sneakingest of all the lot was Trot."

Wide knelt, throwing his arms around the neck of the faithful mascot, who gave three short, joyous barks.

"Good old Trot!" murmured Wide, huskily. "You're a real mascot, and no mistake."

Celeste Mignon glared at the dog, with gleaming eyes.

"Beast!" she muttered. "Miser-able br-r-rute!"

"That's just a difference of opinion, according to the point of view," Hal said, smiling, quietly. "As for our side, we'd vote a gold medal to Trot if he could only understand what it all meant."

"And I'm not sure that the knowing old fellow wouldn't," uttered Joe, as he bent to stroke the delighted dog's head.

"Since we've got the wagon out there," declared Wide, "we may as well load these prisoners into it."

"Prisoners. Load us in the wagon!" quivered Celeste. "What may that mean, my gallant fire captain?"

"Why," answered Wide, shortly, "we're going to take you to Belmont, so that the police can have just a look at you all."

"Police! Surely you don't mean that, my gallant young gentleman?" cried Celeste, pathetically, her eyes filling with tears.

"Wait and see whether we mean it," Young Wide Awake advised, grimly.

Celeste began to plead, sobbingly, but her remonstrances were cut short by the loading of the six captives into the wagon.

There was room enough for them, with a little squeezing.

Wide took his place on the seat and drove on his return to Belmont, Trot sitting up beside him, a very proud mascot.

The other young Washingtons pedalled along, slowly, before and behind the wagon, a very capable escort.

It may be mentioned, in passing, that all six of the young people are now serving the State, where they are of the most use.

As the cavalcade got well down Main Street that night, it was espied by Chief John Sharp, who was talking at a corner with one of his policemen.

Quickly enough, Wide and his comrades turned the prisoners over to the police.

The young firemen were glad to be rid of such charges.

"By the way, Wide?" demanded Chief Sharp, "do you know a Mrs. Wright?"

"Yes," nodded the young fire captain, with a swift dread

that some new misfortune had happened to that hapless woman.

"She wants to see you. She's up at the Belmont Hospital."

"Hurt?"

"No; but she's there, and wants to see you. She's with August Crafts, the man you brought out of Carson's apartment house this afternoon. Mrs. Wright is in a hurry, too, to see you, I believe."

As it was plain that Chief Sharp would not allay his curiosity any, our hero hastened home, where he hastily attired himself for a visit to the hospital.

As he was ushered silently into the ward where Crafts lay, Mrs. Wright rose softly from beside a cot half way down the ward, and came toward our hero.

"Oh, I must thank you so much!" the poor woman whispered, through her happy tears. "The man you saved this afternoon was the one who caused my husband's ruin, as I told you. Crafts is dying now, so we must not speak harshly of him. He was also responsible, indirectly, though I did not know it, for my poor husband's second misfortune. Crafts has confessed, in legal form, to both crimes, and so my poor, dear husband will be here to-morrow, a cleared man before the world, as he has always been an honest man! And now my child will have her father! Oh, we shall all be so happy, Captain Halstead!"

When she had recovered somewhat from her emotion, Mrs. Lewis, for that was her hitherto unfortunate husband's real name, led our hero to the bedside of the dying man.

"Thank you for saving me long enough to do the right thing," whispered the dying man, weakly.

He was gone by morning.

Judson went by another route—the jail route.

He was wanted for serious crimes in another State, and is now paying the penalty for them behind bars.

THE END.

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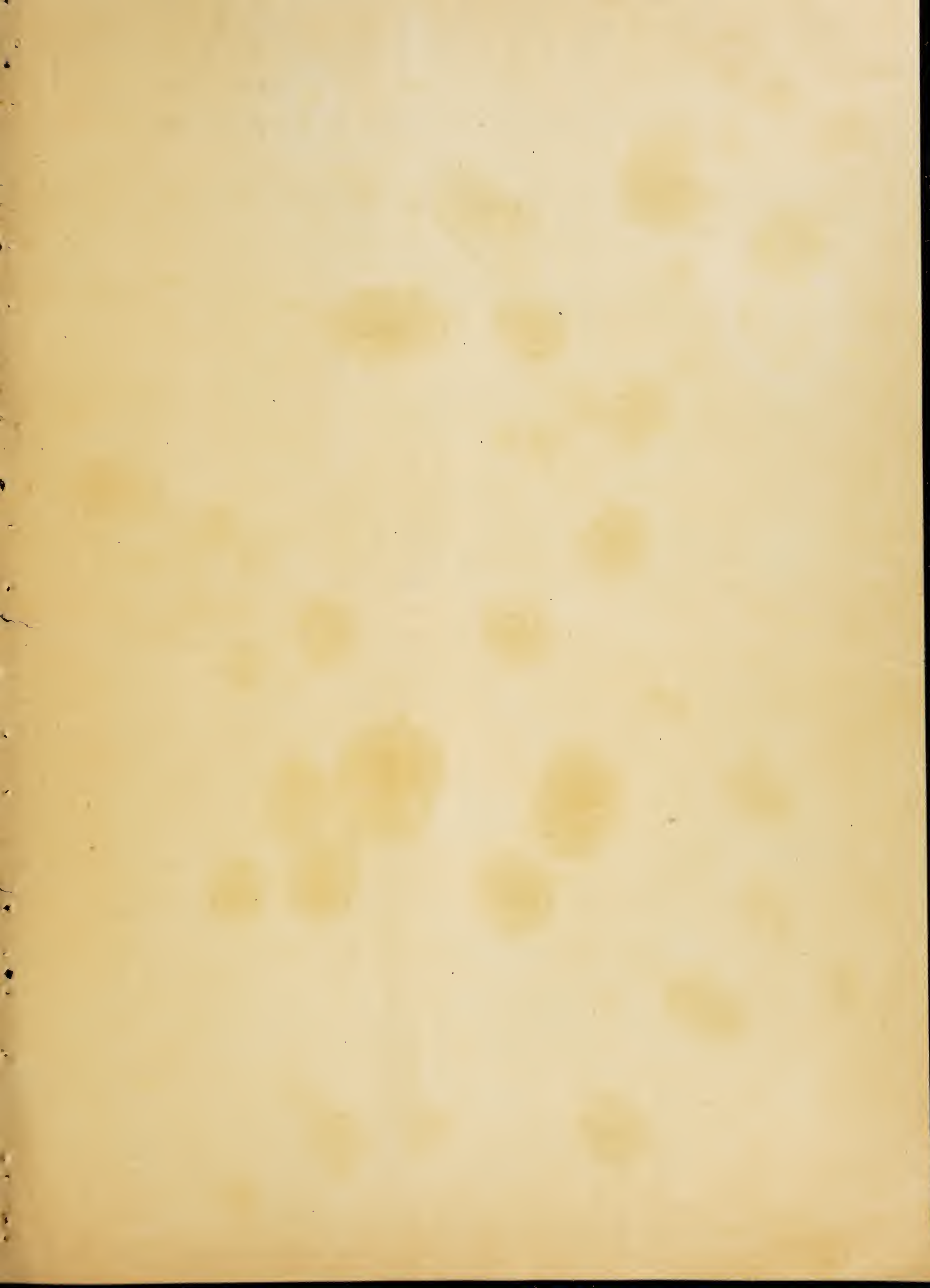
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